NATHAN TODD

EDWARD S. ELLIS

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NATHAN TODD

OR

THE FATE OF THE SIOUX' CAPTIVE

BY

EDWARD S. ELLIS

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"THE FOREST SPY," ETC.

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NATHAN TODD:

A SEQUEL TO "BILL BIDDON."

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THERE IS A CROSS AND A CROWN.

"WELL, here I am, at last, alone in the woods! and it's a wonderful adventure I've started upon, too! I, Nathan Todd, of Lubec, have come to the determination to make a search for Irene Merment, who like enough died ten years ago! No one believes she is living besides me; and what am I going to hunt her up for? As true as I live, I believe I *love* her; and if she is ever found I'll offer myself to her.

"I flatter myself I have an extended reputation in these parts, and my acquaintance is very considerable; and, although it's myself who says it, my moral character stands as high as any of the people

hereabouts. I hope my motives are good in remaining here. Relmond has found himself a wife, and I don't see why I can't. I'll do it, by gracious! and won't that Sarah Almina feel bad when she finds it out? I know she wanted to get me off here, so she could marry that Bill Hankins. I reckon the shoe will be on t'other foot when she sees me flourishing around Lubec with a wife and a dozen young geniuses, taking them out airing in a big carriage with lamps on, dressing them up in store clothes, etc., etc. I'll do it, sure as the world!"

Thus commented Nat Todd, as the last sound of the steamer, which bore away William Relmond and Imogene Merment, reached his ears. He stood in the midst of that vast forest which stretches away to the west of the Missouri river. The words recorded will give an idea of the cause that led him to this course. During his stay among the Indians of the Northwest, he had often conversed with Imogene Merment, the captive, in regard to her lost sister. Although she believed that the latter was lost forever, yet the probability of her yet living was such as to strengthen Nat in the determination to make a search for her on his own responsibility. The only clue to guide him was the suspicion of Imogene that the captors of her sister had proceeded westward to Oregon. From the fact that she had

never seen any Indians similar in dress since that time, and from the recollection she entertained of them, she gathered this impression.

"Let me see," mused Nat, as he walked slowly along. "Here I am on the banks of the Yellowstone, and Oregon is quite a little distance away. I might have taken that steamer, I s'pose, for some considerable ways, but I don't s'pose it connects with any railroad further up, so I wouldn't have gained so much after all. And it ain't certain that Irene is in Oregon yet, and I wish to make inquiries of the neighbors along the way. I think I might pass for a redskin very well. That looks fine, and no doubt would impress Irene with awe, if she should see it," continued Nat, taking off his plumes and surveying them; "but they don't fit my head so well, after all, as the old gray hat I bought up in Lubec, one Fourth of July, and I'm afraid I can never get along with these things. However, they must answer till I get better ones; and it's time I was moving."

So saying, our hero replaced his plumes and walked slowly away in the forest. He had evidently decided upon the execution of some darling plan, for his face expanded into a broad smile and his steps were lively and animated. The direction which he took was such as to lead him to the

"Death Rock," from which he had started the morning before. The day was one of the most beautiful of the year. The appearance of the vast mountains and prairies of the Northwest in summer far surpasses that of the more settled portions of our country. The change from the intense cold and stillness of winter to the animated glory of spring is wonderful. The snow disappears as if by magic, the ice-bound rivers break up with a crash like the shock of an earthquake, the naked trees commence budding and blooming, and in a few weeks the country is transformed into a teeming Paradise. The air is darkened by the flocks of birds circling overhead, the streams are alive with the flashing trout and thousands of other fish, and the vast droves of buffaloes may be seen sporting on the plains or thundering forward in innumerable herds. Now and then immense numbers of horses may be seen, careering gayly over the prairie, as free and joyous as the wind. The forest arches echo with the notes of birds and the scream of the wild animal, while myriads of the beaver and otter are hard at work in the different streams. All is changed as if by enchantment.

Such an appearance did the forest present as Nat

Todd made his way through it. His sense of the beautiful was limited, and the bewildering scene around he took as a matter of course. It couldn't well be otherwise, and so he judged it best not to get excited over it. Once or twice he came in view of an antelope that circled around him in the woods, as if in sport. Finally, becoming too reckless, it fell a victim to his rifle.

"You might've knowed better than to cross Nat Todd's path, for he is a dangerous man, and it's nothing short of suicide to get before his rifle. Bill Biddon could have told you that. I don't feel very sorry, as I am amazingly hungry."

As it was about noon, he halted and cut the choicest portion from the antelope for his dinner. This was toasted over a fire; he made a hearty meal from it, and in a short time he was on his journey again.

Just as darkness was settling over the forest, he reached the "Death Rock," and crept into its dismal recesses. The night was cold, and he started a fire, although it was as much to cheer the gloomy place as to afford him any warmth. As the blaze flamed up on the rocky floor, it lighted up many a dark nook, and threw fantastic shadows into the

forbidding rents that yawned around. Here and there a ghastly skull or bone gleamed in the firelight, and in some places the skeletons had been almost undisturbed by the ravenous beasts. As Nat lit his pipe and gazed around him, his thoughts brought more than one shudder to him. It seemed he could see the doomed Indians clustered together on that fatal day, when the last one defended the entrance against the relentless besiegers. He could fancy the sullen, despairing gleam as the solitary savage gazed behind him and saw his dead companions, and himself the last remnant of his tribe; the lofty, heroical countenance as the warrior folded his own arms in death; the yells of baffled fury, as the besiegers poured into the cavern and found not a victim left them; and finally, the last scene of all, when the wolves swarmed into the cavern and completed the terrible work. The human bones, strewn for many feet from the Rock, showed what a wild carnival the beasts of prey had held over their unwonted feast.

But the night had not far advanced when this gloomy picture faded from our hero's imagination. An hour's comfort from his soothing pipe made him drowsy and forgetful, and he was falling off into

slumber, when he was aroused by hearing a deep growl near him. Starting up, he saw several eyeballs glowing in the darkness at the entrance of the cave, and could detect more than one pair of jaws gleaming and snapping together. Without changing his position, he raised his rifle and sent its contents among them. There were several sharp yelps, a confused scampering, and the next instant the passage was still as death.

"Positively, no admittance under any pretense whatever," said Nat, as he rose and passed to the mouth of the cave. "I've camped here before, and never like to be disturbed, so I'll just close the door. Hello! hit you, did I?"

This exclamation was caused by stumbling over the dead body of a wolf which had fallen in the entrance. It was of the species termed the "mountain wolf"—the largest and most dangerous kind found in the West. Nat rolled it outside, where it was seized in an instant by its unfeeling companions, and in a half-hour nothing was left of the unfortunate animal except a few shiny bones, over which the others wrangled for a much longer time. Nat, with a great deal of labor, rolled a huge rock to the entrance, effectually barring it against all except

human intruders, and then returned to the fire. Here, instead of wrapping himself up in his blanket and lying down at once, he seated himself as if engaged in deep thought. He remained a long time, gazing dreamily into the embers before him, until, as was his habit, he commenced talking to himself.

"There's no use of thinking about it, for it's so, just as plain as was them wolves' eyes awhile ago. Bill Relmond used to pray every night and morning, and he's gone through all safe, and got a wife in the bargain. That Imogene used to pray, and appeared to be always thinking about heaven and the angels—that I'll bet are just like her—and she's got a husband. Bill Biddon used to swear like blazes sometimes, but I know I once heard him ask the Lord to take care of him. Well, here's me, Nat Todd, going on one of the greatest tramps that was ever invented, and if anybody wants taking care of it's this same Nat Todd, and it ain't noways likely the Lord will take any notice of me unless I ask him to. So I'll do it. I'll pray to him every morning and night."

This good resolution arrived at, Nat did not hesitate to put it into execution. Kneeling on the

rock, he spent a time in earnest supplication, and when finished, laid down at once to slumber.

Several times he partly woke, as the snarling wolves fought and tugged at the rock which blocked up their way; but he did not arise, as he felt secure. When the light of morning streamed into the cave, the brutes departed.

Not forgetting his morning devotion, he arose and made ready to continue his journey. He had a portion of the antelope sufficient to make a breakfast, and enough ammunition to furnish him with all the food he would be likely to need for a long time to come.

The weather still continued pleasant; and with buoyant spirits he descended the mountain in a direction toward the lake where he had first encountered Relmond, after his capture by the Indians.

"I wonder whether I'll find it," he mused. "If I can get that and a hoss, I'll be fitted out, and won't care for anything else."

He had seen as yet no signs of Indians, but proceeded with extreme caution. During his stay among his tribe, he had been allowed considerable freedom, as has been shown; but, now that Imogene

had effected her escape, he knew a closer surveillance would be kept over him in case he should unwittingly come upon some of his captors.

"I wish I had a hoss!" he exclaimed for the twentieth time. "I'm getting tired of this everlasting tramping. My gracious! what's them?"

As if in answer to his wish, he beheld, hardly a hundred yards distant, two horses leisurely cropping the grass. A second glance showed both to be furnished with Indian saddles and bridles, though they were much scratched and disarranged from their passage through the woods and undergrowth.

"I thank the Lord for that," said Nat, earnestly; "it's a special providence that both are saddled as I don't like riding bareback. When one get's tired of carrying me, the other can take a turn. Ah! they're the two hosses that Relmond told me got away from him and Imogene the other night. Yes! there's her pony, as sure as the world. I've often seen her with him. I must get *him!*"

With this, he proceeded to capture the Indian pony, which, in reality, was the one once owned by Imogene. This was exceedingly difficult, as the animal had already scented danger, and stood ready to bound away in an instant. But Nat was equal to the difficulty, and at last seized the bridle and vaulted into the saddle.

" Away his horse careered as swift as the wind,"

"Whoop!" he shouted, swinging his plumes over his head. "Three cheers for Nat Todd! all ready! hurrah!"

He had secured a prize indeed. His horse was a coal-black pony, fiery and high-spirited, with clean, graceful limbs, and of good bottom. He was obedient, too, under rein, and dashed away as merrily as if he enjoyed himself as much as his master.

"There's only one thing more that I need, and I must have that."

Away his horse careered, as swift as the wind—now thundering up some swell in the prairie, now plunging headlong through the bushes, and then dropping into a walk as his path led through the denser wood. Nat had left the mountain which contained the "Death Rock," and was journeying over a well-timbered country, crossed by innumerable streams and patches of prairie.

Late in the afternoon he reached the lake of which we have spoken. Here he dismounted, and leading his horse a short distance away, secured him, while he made a search for his canoe. He found it just as it had been left. Springing into it, he shot rapidly toward the opposite shore. It was a long pull, and it required an hour to reach it. As the canoe grated on the sand, he sprung out and

hurried away a short distance, when he halted beside an old rotten chestnut. His manner was excited, and he breathed rapidly as he plunged his hand into a rent in the side. While feeling around in the darkness, his eye suddenly sparkled with exultation, and he exclaimed:

"I've got it! whoop! I've got it!"

And the next instant he hauled out into the light his—*old fur hat!*

CHAPTER II.

NAT'S FIRST ADVENTURE.

"YES, I've got the blessed thing!" exclaimed our hero in his joy. "Nobody hasn't disturbed it. There! that's the last of you!" he added, as he dashed his gaudy plumes to the ground. Then, placing his own cool hat on his head, he continued, "O-h-h-h! ain't that nice!—Jerusalem!"

It was no wonder at all, that he uttered the last exclamation, for, at the first turn in the walk he had commenced with his recovered prize, his eyes encountered the chief of the very tribe he had left! The savage was scarce a dozen feet distant, and had been watching him all the time. Nat recovered his equanimity in an instant.

"How are you, Upsarena? Glad to see you—(no, I'll be hanged if I am.) Hope you're well—(no, I don't, either.)"

"The Long Knife hunts a great while!" replied the chief, without noticing his words.

"Well, yes, 'twas quite a spell. Hope you haven't been anxious on my account."

The chief gazed steadily at him a moment, and then said:

"The Long Knife will go to the lodges of Upsarena."

"Wait, hold on you; I've left my—my—I've left my pocket-book on the other side of the lake, and must go get it."

Before Upsarena could make a reply, Nat reflected that he had told a falsehood, and thus violated the vow he had made the evening before. He resolved at once he wouldn't lie to save his life.

"No, Upsarena, I haven't left my pocket-book, but I have tied my horse on the other side of the lake, and I would not like to go to your lodge without him, because he's a horse that'll make your eyes tingle."

"The Long Knife had no horse when he sought the woods."

"But he found one there."

The Indian gave our hero one of his piercing glances, and the latter saw at once that he was disbelieved.

"Upsarena will go in the search!" said the chieftain, quietly.

Now this was as much dreaded by Nat, and was

the first determination the chieftain had expressed, and how to rid himself of his troublesome visitor puzzled him greatly. But he was equal to the emergency. Fortunately, he had been so excited in his hunt for his cherished hat, that he had left his rifle with his horse on the opposite side of the lake. Without waiting as long as it has taken us to record it, he answered:

"Come on, then, Upsarena, for it will soon be dark."

He led the way, followed by the wary chieftain, who watched him as if he suspected mischief. Nat, shoving the canoe into the water, stepped in and seated himself in the forward part, although by doing so he used the long paddle at a considerable disadvantage. Upsarena seated himself in the stern with folded arms, and with his rifle resting on his up-gathered knees.

The canoe sunk to its very gunwales under th combined weight of the two, but Nat impelled it through the water with wonderful velocity. His heart beat quicker, as he reflected upon the expedient necessary to get rid of his troublesome companion. Several times he thought of shooting him, as he sat so grimly and complacently in the stern watching every movement; but he was prevented by several reasons. The first was, his soul revolted at

the thought of such a murder, even though it might add to his personal safety; the second reason was, that if murderously inclined, he had no rifle with him; and the last one was, that even if he possessed a weapon, he was afraid to use it in the manner mentioned—all of which goes to prove that Upsarena was in little danger of being shot at present.

Now and then he glanced furtively over his shoulder, as he neared the shore of the lake, while the grim chieftain remained as stern and immovable as a statue. Hitherto the canoe had glided as smoothly as a bird; but suddenly, when within a hundred yards of the shore, it careened, capsized, and before the wily savage suspected mischief, he was in the water swimming for life. Just as the boat turned, Nat sprung to his feet and made a tremendous leap toward shore, striking out with all his might to reach it before his companion. His stratagem succeeded to a charm. The water, about ten feet in depth, was so clear that the smallest object was distinctly visible on the bottom. Before Upsarena could grasp his rifle it sunk. Unwilling to lose it, he immediately dived for it. He saw it glistening on the pebbly bottom, but failed to recover it the first time, owing to the shortness of breath with which he descended. A second effort was more

successful, and he rose to the surface with the cherished weapon in his hand. At this instant our hero emerged from the water, and made some "tall walking" for his horse. He found the animal as he had left him, loosed his halter, vaulted into the saddle and sped away.

"Good-by, Upsarena!" he shouted. "Remember me to the folks up in your parts; and now and then remember Nat Todd, and the nice swim you and he took together."

But Nat's exultation was premature; for, as the last word escaped him, and he swung his hat over his head, several rifles flamed from the forest behind him, and as many bullets whizzed through the air in uncomfortable proximity to his body.

"Jerusalem! who fired them? That's more than I bargained for!"

The truth was, the upsetting of the boat had been witnessed by three savages of Upsarena's tribe who had been hunting with him. They supposed it to be purely accidental, and knowing there was no danger to either, stood and calmly watched the struggles of the two in the water. When Nat emerged from the water and hurried up the bank, however, their suspicions were aroused and they dashed after him. When they came in view again, the audacious white was galloping away, shouting

and swinging his hat in the manner described. Their suspicions were confirmed at once, and the three fired, without waiting for their chief. The latter was with them in a moment, and, brandishing his rifle over his head furiously commanded the capture of the white man. Forgetting himself, Upsarena raised his own rifle, took aim and pulled the trigger. But the click of the lock reminded him that for the present his weapon was harmless.

"His scalp must hang in Upsarena's lodge at the rising of the sun!" shouted the enraged warrior, bounding forward in pursuit.

Nat, if he did not hear these words, guessed as much, and judged it best not to dispute with the chieftain about the matter.

"Come, my hoss, let's see what kind of stuff you're made of."

The pony, as if sensible of what was required, burst forward like a thunderbolt, leaving the pursuers rapidly behind. The lake lay at the foot of a mountain, and was fringed by dense masses of undergrowth, together with numbers of trees of considerable size. As Nat freed himself from this cover, he emerged upon a rolling prairie scores of miles in width, and open, save that, at long intervals, it was interpersed with narrow groves of timber, which, in turn, bordered the streams crossing it.

"His scalp must hang at Upsarena's lodge at the rising of the sun."

Fortunately it was growing dark, and he felt that his enemies could not trouble him much longer. Nevertheless, he was not the man to remain in danger when the opportunity was afforded for escaping it. So he loosened the rein and let his horse go. The last glimpse he cast behind him showed him the dusky figures of the savages far in the rear on a hill, standing together as if in consultation.

"I thought you'd come to your senses," he remarked, "and not spend your breath in trying to catch what can't be caught."

Feeling thus secure from danger, our hero drew his horse down to a walk, and made his way leisurely forward. The night was cold and windy. There was no moon; in a short time the darkness became so heavy as to veil everything in almost impenetrable obscurity.

After journeying an hour more, he descended a sort of valley, and found himself in the midst of a grove of cottonwoods. The sound of running water showed him what sort of place he had come upon, and he decided at once to camp for the night.* He led his horse a short distance up stream, and picketed him in such a manner that the least effort

* Whenever persons rest for the night they are said to "camp;" and, as the term is used in the West, it is as applicable to a single person as to more.

made to escape could not fail to arouse the hunter. This done, he peeled off a goodly quantity of the cottonwood bark, and laying it in reach of him, made preparations for his own comfort. Under the circumstances, it was too hazardous to risk a fire, and he was content to nestle down in his blanket at the foot of a huge willow.

Sleep, heavy and sweet, gradually overcame the hunter, and in a short time he was as unconscious of external things as if he had never been born.

It was near midnight when he awoke. What it was that aroused him he could never tell; but, he had grown to believe there was a special Providence watching over him, and attributed it to that alone. It sometimes happens that, in the midst of heavy slumber, our senses are quietly but instantaneously aroused, and it was thus with our adventurer. Before he hardly knew it himself, his eyes opened as did every sense. He lay perfectly motionless and listened. The wind sighed mournfully through the tree-tops above him, and the stream rippled as sweetly as ever. Still, he did not stir, for he *felt* the danger that was lurking in the air around him.

The next instant he was startled by the snapping of a twig, as though the foot of some one passing had broken it, and a minute after he heard voices!

They spoke in the tongue of the Sioux, and he thus knew they were his pursuers.

"The Long Knife has camped here," spoke one, as if in consultation with the others.

"Has he not passed through the stream and fled onward?" asked another.

"The trail leads to the trees and is lost. It is not on the other side."

A few moments' silence followed the latter remark. Then the savages recommenced their search. With feelings that may well be imagined, Nat shrunk beneath the sheltering tree and listened. Now the cautious tread came nigher and nigher, until it seemed discovery was inevitable. Then again the sounds grew fainter and fainter, until he began to breathe freer, when a shiver would run over him as he heard the deep breathing of one of his enemies within striking distance. How his horse escaped discovery he was at a loss to tell; but in such cases it often seems the instinct that protects the animal is equal to the reason that saves the man. It appears incredible that such brutes as horses and cows can conceal themselves so as to baffle discovery even under the light of day. But that such is the fact is well known.

The horse, apparently sensible of his duty, remained in a standing position as motionless as the

tree beside him; and thus was no more likely to attract attention in the deep gloom than an inanimate object. Thus it was the cautious Indian fairly brushed him several times without so much as suspecting his existence. Another thing puzzled Nat greatly. How was it possible for them to detect his trail in the darkness? Sight surely could avail nothing in such an emergency.

"The all-fired imps have come on their hands and knees all the way smelling of the trail," he muttered to himself.

The true cause was soon evident, however. Even while speaking, he saw a small point of light glide silently forward and disappear on the opposite side of the stream. In a second, it flitted to view again, and then was as quickly extinguished. Almost immediately, a noise, as if some one were stepping in the water, was heard, and then followed a silence of five minutes' duration. While wondering with a fear which was not free from superstition, Nat suddenly ducked his head, as a torch blazed to view within thirty feet of him. Looking carefully out, he saw the torch moving to and fro, and lighting up the gleaming, painted visage of Upsarena. The savage was in a crouching position, moving as

stealthily as the panther, his eyeballs glowing like fire.

"How nice I could wipe you out!" thought Nat, "but I forbear. It don't look right to take a fellow so unawares. Jerusalem! don't come any nigher!"

The Indian was now so close that Nat feared the thumping of his heart would betray his hiding-place. The chief held the torch over his head, his basilisk eyes scrutinizing the ground for any evidence of a trail. He moved slowly and stealthily around, sometimes stooping and moving the grass with his fingers, and then, rising to the upright position, he glared up into the trees, as though he expected to detect the form of his foe among the branches. He must have had a small opinion of our hero's courage to thus expose himself to his shot. Suddenly the light disappeared, and a sharp, hissing sound, as of a serpent about to strike, did not escape the adventurer's ears. The next moment the voice of Upsarena was heard.

"The trail reaches the stream, but does not cross. He has followed the water above, and is not here."

Then the tramp of the retreating savages was heard, growing fainter and fainter, until no noise remained to show that danger had lurked so fearfully near.

"Well, I feel a heap better!" exclaimed Nat, rising to his feet and stretching himself. "Them ain't very smart Indians after all. They've been following me all the time I've been asleep, and have hunted all around me without coming to the point. I thought Upsarena wasn't—"

Standing out in relief against a patch of open sky, Nat saw the form of an Indian distinctly outlined. The truth was the words of Upsarena were only an artifice to ascertain whether the hunter was concealed in the vicinity. He uttered them in a loud tone, and immediately ascended the stream, while another savage glided forward a short distance, and then halted, his ears on the alert for any suspicious sound. The long-drawn yawn and words of Nat reached his ears, but the obscurity was too great for him to detect the precise spot where the hunter was standing. At the same time, the Indian was not aware that he was seen at all by his enemy.

For a moment both remained perfectly motionless. That time was amply sufficient for Nat to collect his thoughts. The sudden stoppage of his words showed the Indian that the hunter suspected danger, although he was by no means aware of his full knowledge. For a few seconds after the discovery,

our hero was completely astounded; but it was no time to give way to his emotions. He saw instantly that either one or the other must die, and naturally preferring it should not be himself, made his preparations accordingly. Putting the lock of his rifle under his hunting-shirt, he so muffled the click, while cocking it, as to conceal the sound from his enemy.

With the Indian, the minute had been as pregnant with emotions as with the white man. His first thought when startled by Nat's words was to signal to his companions to approach; but he saw at once that such a course would give the hunter timely warning, and being an ambitious man, he determined to secure his scalp without the aid of his companions.

Nat saw the head of the Indian slowly sink, and his body gradually blend with the undergrowth, and taking as good aim as the darkness allowed, he fired. A yell of agony and fury, so horrible as to craze the hunter, followed, and the hurrying tramp of feet was heard. Nat, hardly conscious of what he did, ran a short distance, and brought up against a tree, which he ascended in a twinkling. Cowering among the limbs, he listened.

Everything was as silent as death. Once a faint, suppressed moan was heard, but nothing else, save the sighing of the wind and the ripple of the stream, disturbed the oppressive stillness. A faint moon had now arisen, and its light illumined the prairie for a short distance. But the stream, the trees and valley were like a solid mass of darkness winding across the country, and although he strained his vision to the utmost to pierce the gloom beneath, it was all in vain. With a great deal of difficulty and trepidation, he succeeded in loading his rifle, and anxiously waited for the further development of the danger.

In a half-hour, something was seen to flit like a star among the bushes below, and a second glance showed our hero that the torch was again in requisition.

"It'll never do for them to bring that candle under this tree," muttered the hunter. "They'd just as sure get a glimpse of me here. Strange! they've no more fear of me than to show themselves that way. Well! it's time they learned a lesson, and I don't know of a person better qualified than Nat Todd to give 'em one. I wish that plaguy Indian would just hold still a minute till I can draw bead on him."

All this time he was dodging his head around, hurriedly pushing the muzzle of his rifle through the branches, and doing his utmost to get a sight at the savage holding the torch. Failing to do this, and the light constantly approaching his hiding-place, he at last became so excited as to entirely forget himself.

"Say, you, just look out for your head now—"

Instantly the light became stationary, and the bronzed features of a savage were seen for a second, when all was darkness again—but not before the rifle of our hero flamed out in the darkness, with no effect save to desperately frighten his enemies, each scattering to cover as quick as thought. Fortunately for Nat, the flash of his weapon was not seen, and his hiding-place remained as great a mystery to his foes.

An hour of undisturbed stillness followed. The hunter was too shrewd to be deceived by the silence of the Indians. That they were plotting some new mischief was certain, and all that he could do was to do nothing but to lie close and keep a bright lookout.

Despite the fearful circumstances in which Todd was placed, a heavy drowsiness began to steal over

him. First he gave a sudden nod, bumping his head against the tree, which thoroughly awaked him.

"Jerusalem! if I wasn't going to sleep," he gasped, "with them imps sneaking right under me. I won't wink both eyes agin to-night."

To enforce this good resolution he pinched himself, pulled his hair, and resorted to every artifice at hand. Finally, he began speculating upon the end of his present dilemma. He must be out of it pretty soon by some means or other, or his case would be hopeless. The morning could not be far off, and when his situation became known, an unconditional surrender would be the only course left; and Nat well knew that to fall into his enemies' hands after committing such crimes as he had, would terminate his adventures at once.

A similar situation and such thoughts as these were certainly enough to keep any ordinary mortal awake. But sleep is as insidious an enemy as death, and, do his utmost, Nat could not keep him off. He succumbed at last in spite of himself.

"The Injin's all right, I guess—so's Nat Todd—all right—clever fellers—'s all right!"

Thus he mumbled, as he commenced nodding again. Finally he laid his head on the limb before him, closed his eyes, and resigned himself to his dreams. And the dreams came, and his sleep was

disturbed. He fancied he was in a hand-to-hand struggle with Upsarena, and made an effort to give him a kick. In so doing he unseated himself and dropped to the ground. His rifle falling upon him effectually awoke him, and he instantly comprehended his situation. He lay quietly for a moment, and then felt cautiously around for his hat. Placing this on his head, he grasped his rifle and then opened his eyes and looked above.

His blood froze with horror as he saw two monstrous eyes, seemingly of some dread animal, within a foot of his face! A row of white teeth gleamed still closer, and the hot breath of the monster mingled with his own. Nat closed his eyes and shudderingly awaited his fate. He felt the breath grow warmer, and heard it drawn louder as though his foe were gathering to strike. He uttered a short prayer, and believed that all was over. Something warm touched his cheek, as though an animal were licking it. He opened his eyes again and saw that he had fallen at the feet of his horse, who was thus manifesting his affection for his master.

"I've a good notion to shoot you for scaring me so," muttered Nat. "No, bless your old heart, you're just the one I want to see."

He quickly cut the thong that bound the horse,

leaped in the saddle, and turning the animal's head toward the open prairie, started him on a full run. The inevitable shout and swing of the hat accompanied this movement, but there was no answering yell from the savages. They were at that moment several hundred yards up-stream, and caught a shadowy glimpse of a man galloping away in the darkness, as his triumphant shout reached their ears. One of their number had fallen and their intended prey had escaped.

There were a few stars in the sky, which was gradually lighting up with the approach of day, as he hurried his horse away from the grove. The air was cold and raw—the scene cheerless and dismal; but his spirits were too much heightened by his fortunate escape to notice this peculiarity. He gave his horse free rein, gradually sheering him off to the left until he was proceeding in a northern direction. When he left the grove he had followed the back trail, so that this last course was taken to regain the lost ground. After a time he made another turn at right angles to the one which he was pursuing, and in such a manner that he described a semicircle.

As the first rays of the sun appeared above the prairie, he reached the identical stream which had been the scene of his adventures through the night,

but at a point several miles above. Making his way through the grove, he once more dashed out upon the open prairie, and was galloping onward toward the Rocky Mountains.

CHAPTER III.

SHOWING THAT WE ARE NEVER TO OLD TO LEARN.

THUS far Nat Todd had journeyed without following any definite course or plan. The all-absorbing object which led him westward was sufficient to make one of his temperament attempt any journey on the North American continent; but, as said, he had laid down no course to follow, in order to attain the end. Now, as he reined his horse down to a slow walk, he commenced meditating upon the proper course for him to pursue.

He reflected that he had been guided up to this point by a mere whim. A suspicion of Imogene Merment, that the tribe who captured her sister had proceeded to Oregon, had grown to a seeming certainty, and he had suffered himself to be blindly led by it. For aught he knew, she might have been taken to Southern California or New Mexico, and it was as probable that she was in possession of one of the hundred tribes of the Southwest as of the Northwest. Over that mighty area of country, comprehending twenty degrees of latitude, and

exceeding in extent all the States east of the Mississippi, roamed thousands of Indians, any tribe of which might hold the object of his journey; and the valleys of the Columbia, Sacramento, or Colorado, or the slopes of the Cascade, Humboldt river, Sierra Nevada, or Black Hills, might be searched without giving him intelligence of the lost one's fate. This gigantic undertaking our hero fully realized, and determined, if possible, to hunt no further without some clue to assist him.

Scattered at great distances along the Oregon trail, and on the rivers west of the Rocky Mountain slope, were forts or stations, where, at all times, were congregated hunters and trappers from every part of the Far West. Nat doubted not but that he would be able to gain information from some of them which would guide him in his search.

"Yes, that's the plan," he exclaimed, joyously. "I'll go down to the forts and find out all about her, and then hunt her up, take her home and marry her. *Then* won't Alminy feel bad! Won't she!"

The morning was now quite advanced, and he concluded it best to give his horse a good rest, and refresh himself before proceeding further. He had noticed, for the last hour or so, a peculiar dull roaring sound, like the distant roll of the ocean, and was led to suspect he was near some river.

Turning his horse to the left, he had proceeded but a mile or so, when he came upon a small river, which he knew at once to be the Big Horn. It was narrow, but deep and clear, flowing swiftly over a bed of pebbles, that could be seen glistening far out from the shore. The water, hardly free from the snow of the mountains, was of icy coldness. The grass along its banks was luxuriant, and Nat turned his horse loose, knowing that he would not wander far, while he busied himself with hunting some food for himself. Singularly enough, he could not catch sight of any game, not even a fowl or rabbit. Fish of monstrous size could be seen lazily floating in the streams, but it was out of his power to secure them, and he finally made a breakfast off the numerous *commotes* and *pomme blancs* that were growing around him.* This done, he returned to his horse and started a fire. There were numerous trees growing in the river bottom, and he had little apprehension of disturbance from the Indians. The air, sweeping down from the Black Hills, was as cold and bracing as winter, and he vastly enjoyed the fire he had kindled.

* The *commote* is a vegetable resembling the common radish, which is often found in the river bottoms of the West. The *pomme blanc* is a native of the mountains, and much resembles, both in size and taste, our turnip, although more nourishing than the latter.

While preparing to resume his journey, he was startled by the actions of his horse. He had raised his head, his mouth still full of grass, and, with every manifestation of alarm, was gazing up the stream. His ears were thrust forward, his fore-feet planted firmly on the ground, his nostrils dilated as though he scented danger in the air. Nat bounded to cover at once, and concealing himself behind a tree, peered cautiously out to ascertain the cause of these actions.

The alarm of the horse continued. He suddenly turned and ran a short distance, when he wheeled around with a snort and faced the suspicious object again. A slight wind was blowing from that direction, and Nat well knew his animal was not deceived. His heart beat faster as he reflected that a band of hostile Indians or a grizzly bear might be stealing upon him, and he silently cocked his rifle, determined to fire and then run for life.

While standing thus, every nerve strung to the highest point, he saw a human head, surmounted by a coon-skin cap, slowly rise from behind a clump of bushes, until the face and shoulders of a white man were visible. It remained a moment in this position, and then quickly disappeared. Nat saw the features too plainly to be mistaken. They were those of one of his own kin, and of one who was

consequently a friend. Without hesitation he called out:

"Hello, you, sir! Come out and show yourself! It's me, Nathan Todd, of Maine. Don't be frightened, I won't hurt you."

A moment after, the person addressed stepped boldly into view and advanced toward the fire, where our hero met him. A glance showed the stranger to be a trapper from the mountains. His dress was half-savage, similar to those generally worn on the frontier—composed of moccasins, leggings, the hunting-shirt, and the skin-cap, which was drawn down to the beetling eyebrow in front. A thick, grizzly beard covered most of the face, so that little besides the gleaming eyes and the pug nose was visible. A long, dangerous-looking rifle was held in the left hand, while the right was extended to grasp the proffered one of our hero.

"How-de-do," exclaimed the latter. "Glad to see you. Hope your folks are all well. *I* am, and you look as though you might be."

"What's your handle?" asked the trapper, in a voice that sounded like the rumble of thunder, and which made Nat start from where he stood. "What's the matter?" asked the stranger, as his eyes sparkled.

"Nothin', only I stepped on a pin or tack that

"'What's the matter?' asked the stranger.'"

some one left here—that is, I stepped on *something*. What's my name, did you ask? Nathan Todd—Nathan Todd—O heavens o' nath! don't squeeze my fingers so! What's your name?"

"Tom Langdon, trapper and Indian-fighter."

"So I s'pose—so I s'pose. What are you doing here, if you've no objections to tell a friend?"

"I'm trappin'. This ar' the place whar I've circ'lated for the last ten year, and it's the fust time I've see'd a white in these parts. I'd jest been 'round to 'tend to the traps and skin the beavers, when I cotched sight of your smoke——"

"I hain't been smoking—I hain't been smoking!"

"But your fire has. I see'd the smoke, as I's sayin', and knowed it war a white, and a powerful green one at that, 'cause you wouldn't cotch a red kindlin' a fire right under my nose that way. They've been down in these parts once or twice since I've trapped, and I'd never knowed it ef I hadn't smelt 'em. I see'd yer horse pitch and tear, 'cause he scented the beaver-blood I've got on me. But what brings yer down in these parts? Not trappin', I take it?"

"No; I'm searching for a lovely maiden that was lost many long, long years ago."

It would be difficult to describe the expression that illumined the visage of the trapper at this

reply. His monstrous beard nearly concealed it, but there was a blending of surprise and drollery in it, and he asked:

"How come you to lose her? And what makes you think you'll find her in this region? I never knowed gals were circ'latin' here."

Nat related, as briefly as possible, his own adventures and those of William Relmond since leaving the States, dwelling particularly upon the history of Imogene Merment and the supposed fate of her lost sister. The trapper listened attentively, and at its conclusion gave vent to a silent but hearty laugh.

"What you laughing at?" asked Nat, indignantly.

"You."

"What have I done? I should like to know."

"Oh, you are so powerful *green!*" replied the trapper, still laughing.

Nat held a dignified silence until the mirth of his companion had somewhat abated, when he inquired:

"Am I going to have you for company?"

"Ef yer waits 'yer till about two months more, and then turns your nose toward the States and tramps, p'raps you mought."

"Jerusalem! if I had knowed that, I would have been ten miles further on my journey by this time."

With this, our hero turned and signaled his horse to approach. The trapper looked quietly on, and suffered him to mount without speaking.

"Good-day, sir," said Nat, nodding stiffly.

"I shouldn't wonder," returned the trapper, with a broad smile.

Nat struck his horse into a canter, and had proceeded about a hundred yards, when he heard himself hailed.

"What's wanting?" he asked, wheeling his horse around.

"Jest trot this way a minute," said the stranger.

Nat slowly approached, and in a moment confronted the eccentric hunter.

"Got a piece of pig-tail handy?" asked the latter.

Nat was so provoked that he hardly knew what to reply; but proffered the tobacco which he had obtained from the Indians. The trapper took the plug, twisting a small piece from it. Then holding it out, he asked:

"That's 'nough for a chaw, ain't it?"

"I s'pose so."

"Wal, you take it then."

So saying, he coolly placed the larger piece in his pocket, and turned his back upon Nat. The latter sat like a statue for the space of five minutes, alternately looking at the remnant of his tobacco stock

in his hand and at the one who had deprived him of it. Then, with a half-suppressed "What an awful hog!" he once more cantered away.

"Hello, Nathin Toad!" called the trapper, when he had proceeded even further than before.

Our hero cantered on without heeding.

"Hello, you, Nathin Toad!" came again in a thundering voice.

"What do you want?" asked Nat, spitefully.

"Jest come here a minute."

Had our adventurer deemed himself fairly out of rifle-shot, no commands would have brought him back; but, not knowing what his new-found acquaintance would take into his head to do, he concluded it hardly safe to tempt him too much.

"Well, here I am again," he said, as he once more confronted his troublesome companion. "I haven't any more tobacco to spare, though."

The trapper bent his keen gaze on him a moment, then asked:

"You're lookin' fur a gal, ain't you?"

"For a maiden—yes."

"And you haven't axed whether I didn't know nothin' 'bout her."

Nat started, for the idea of obtaining information of the person before him had never entered his

mind until he had thus been reminded of it; and he saw, moreover, that the trapper was in earnest.

"My gracious! I never thought of it—that's true! Do you know anything of her?"

"Yes."

"When?—how?—where?—what did you say?—who's got her?—when did you see her?" eagerly asked Nathan, fairly beside himself.

"Jest hold on now. Let—me—see," slowly repeated the trapper, removing his cap and scratching his head, as if to help his memory. "I've heard of a gal somewhar, but you may raise my ha'r if I can tell whar it was."

"Jerusalem! can't you remember?" excitedly asked Nat. "Think hard; you'll recollect in a minute. I'll die if I don't find out something now."

"Nathin Toad," said the trapper, looking up in his face, "the minute you told me that story, I knowed *some* one had told me sunkthin' like it, and I tried to think who it war. I called yer back and axed yer fur that pig-tail, jest to see how you'd take it. Ef you'd been mean, I wouldn't said nothin' to you about the gal; but you's pretty clever like, and I'll try and overhaul this memory of mine. Let—me—see," repeated the trapper again, fixing his eyes upon the ground and thinking intently.

"She's a splendid-looking maiden," quickly added Nat, as if to assist his recollection.

"Jest put a stop on that meat-trap of yourn, while I cogitate awhile."

So saying, the trapper folded his arms over the muzzle of his rifle, and leaning his chin upon it, appeared to gaze far off at the clouds that were straggling through the western horizon. His eyes had that vacant look which showed his mind to be entirely occupied with itself, and totally oblivious of everything else. Nearly twenty minutes were thus occupied, during which, it may well be supposed, the impatience of Nat could not but manifest itself. He whistled, coughed, sung, fidgeted in his seat, but it availed nothing to the trapper. The solid rock was not more motionless than he. At last he drew a long breath and resumed his upright position.

"Come, let's hear it quick," said Nat.

"It ain't much, I allow, but I make no doubt it's sunkthin'. It was two year ago, down at Brown's Hole, that I heard it. A lot of us fellers were tellin' stories round the fire thar one night, in the winter, when old Sol Jagzin, or 'Oregon Sol,' as he was called, (yes, I'm sure it was Sol, now,) told a wonderful story 'bout a white gal he'd see'd somewhar up in Oregon, near the Blue Mountains, I

think. He had trapped two seasons, near the cañon of one of the rivers thar, and was cac'latin' stayin' another, when one night one of the most bootifulest critters, outside the States, came down on him and told him the reds had spotted him, and war gwine to lift his ha'r and borrer his traps and peltries. He axed her some questions, and larnt that she lived 'mong the reds—though what tribe, I don't mind. She said she and her sister had been took by the knaves when they wan't taller than a young beaver. Sol offered to take her down to one of the forts and start her home agin. But she said she had no home 'cept 'mong the Injins, and wouldn't go. Sol said she was powerful handsome, dressed up like a squaw, with jest such black eyes and ha'r, and with a little foot not bigger than a beaver's claw. He coaxed her a little while, but it was no use. She didn't 'pear to want to leave. She said the reds had found one of Sol's traps the day afore, and they cac'lated on having tall times when they come down on him. She had managed to find out what they was drivin' at, and had hunted 'round till she found out where he hid himself.

"Wal, Sol had jest time to pack up his skins and get out of the way of the imps when they did come down on his house. Howsumever, he was all right, and got off cl'ar. Sol, as I said, told me this two

year ago, and it was two year afore that he had see'd this gal. He said he had gone up in them parts two—three times since, jest to find out 'bout the gal, but never had heard or seen anything of her since. Remember, she wan't a woman, but only a little girl, and may not be the one you're arter, 'cause I know them reds ar' desprit on cotchin' sich poor critters."

"Who is Oregon Sol?" asked Nat breathlessly.

"He's a feller that's trapped up in Oregon nigh onto twenty years, and who's got that name on that account."

"Where is he now?"

"Ugh! gone under, like enough. Hain't seen him since I's down to Brown's Hole two years ago this last winter."

"If living, where do you suppose I could find him?"

"Dunno—he's a quar dog. He's got a home somewhar up in Oregon whar he lives alone, and ef you sarch around thar for ten or fifteen year, you might run afoul of him some dark night."

"But how was it you saw him at Brown's Hole?"

"He comes down thar once in awhile, I b'lieve. It was in the winter, as I said, that I see'd him, but I dunno whether that's the time he takes to make the folks a visit or not. He come the day afore and he

left the next mornin' arter he told us that story."

"Well, now, my friend, you've started me on the right track, I think, and you're welcome to all the tobacco I've got. Now, I'm bound to find that maiden if she's to be found. What plan would you advise me to follow to do this?"

"It's a dubous hunt, Mr. Toad, and, 'yer's as thinks it'll be a long hunt and no game—a long trappin' season without a beaver or otter. But, ef you're bound to put the thing through, why strike a bee-line for Brown's Hole, and jine some of the trappers as goes to Oregon. Find out whether 'Oregon Sol, is livin', and hunt him up ef you can, though he's so strange-like I don't b'lieve he'd have you with him. Ef he ain't gone under, you'll hear of him down at the 'Hole,' though it's likely you'll have to wait awhile, as most of the boys ar' up on the beaver runs."

"How long will it take me to reach the place?"

"Four—five days will take you thar ef you don't stop to make any calls on the reds 'long the ways."

"I've got to cross the Rocky Mountains, of course? I know where Brown's Hole is, and think I can easily find it."

"Foller up this Big Horn to the mountains, and you'll find a pass that'll take you through."

"Whoop! hurrah!" shouted Nat, swinging his hat over his head and dashing away, without pausing to bid his friend good-by. The trapper watched him a moment, and then muttered:

"It'll be a long hunt, I'm afeard."

In a short time the joyous Nat Todd was hid from view by the intervening trees and undergrowth.

CHAPTER IV.

SHOWING THAT IT IS NOT ALWAYS BEST TO BE ALONE.

After leaving the trapper, Nat rode at a brisk gallop in a westerly course, and soon emerged from the river-bottom into the open prairie again. Far ahead loomed the peaks of the Rocky Mountains. Viewed in the clear summer air, their summits seemed tinged with a faint blue, and resembled an irregular pile of clouds resting in the horizon. Away to the northward, as far as the vision could reach, the mighty cliffs alone met the eye; and sweeping around in a western direction, so as to inclose the adventurer in a semicircle, rolled the Black Hills, one of the grandest spurs of the whole Rocky Mountain chain. On the loftiest heights, the pure snow blended almost perfectly with the clear sky beyond. Now and then a blast of wind swept down from the mountains, bringing its arctic climate with it.

When a scene similar to this is gradually approached by the traveler, he experiences its sublimity in all its fullness. The roar of Niagara frequently impresses the senses with a feeling of terror so great as to overcome all other emotions. But the solemn, eternal stillness that surrounds these mountains is so impressive as to be almost *audible,* like the faint roar of the ocean; and the soul seems filled with a thrilling, responsive emotion.

Nat neared the mountains on a brisk canter; but, for a time, seemed to make no progress at all, for distance is as deceptive upon the prairie as upon the water. During the afternoon he entered a pass several miles in breadth, opening before him like a tunnel. He was satisfied, however, that it was not the famous "South Pass," at the head-waters of the Platte, through which the Oregon trail leads. On either hand the gigantic walls towered above him, piercing the very clouds. Rocks, jagged and massive, were piled up thousands of feet above him, and the stunted cedars, a few scrub-oaks and briers, were the only sign of vegetable life. Our hero gazed above and around him, feeling as though passing through the gate of another world. Full a thousand feet above, seated on a projecting rock,

he saw something move which resembled a large squirrel, but which a second look showed to be a grizzly bear. Further on he detected another, but they were so distant he had no fear of them. Viewed from the cliffs, Nat and his horse would have seemed but a mere speck moving through the gorge below.

"I declare this beats all," he mused. "I must call on the President when I go back, and tell him this is the place where the Pacific Railroad should cross the Rocky Mountains. Won't them grizzlys open their eyes when they see the locomotive thunder through here, and hear it give one of its regular hurricane screams? And if old Upsarena should be sulky enough not to give the track when the train comes along, won't he get a bump? Gracious! it'll be as bad as if I had run accidentally into him."

It required several hours, even at the hurried rate at which he was going, to get through the pass. Toward the latter part the way was rougher, and met with more obstructions.

"Well, here I am at last," he exclaimed, as he found himself once more upon the open prairie. "There are no more mountains to cross this side

of the fort, I believe. I'll fetch up there in a day or two, see that Oregon Sol, find out where Irene is, hunt her up, take her down to the States, marry her of course—blazes! what's that?"

A full grown panther stood within a dozen feet of him. Passing a small cluster of trees, the animal bounded in front of his rearing horse with that wondering stare which a brute gives at the first sight of a white man. Nat restrained his horse from fleeing, and hardly knowing what he did, tried to ride down the panther, but his noble horse refused obedience. After a while, our hero bethought himself of his rifle, and without stopping to take aim, fired at the brute. The aimless ball did no harm, and the frightened beast scampered away at a rapid pace.*

"That's the luckiest move you ever made," shouted Nat, after the retreating animal. "If I had time I'd follow you up, and teach you better than to stand before such a dangerous rifle as the one Nathan Todd possesses."

Darkness had now begun to settle over the

* The panther found among the Black Hills is an animal totally dissimilar from the one of the East. The former is of smaller size, scrawny and cowardly, and rarely can be induced to face the hunter, even when wounded.

prairie, and our traveler concluded it best to seek a place for encampment. The place around bore evidence of having been traveled before; and after searching until dark, he decided upon a spot in a valley-like depression, where the remains of a camp-fire were visible. He judged it best not to kindle a fire, as it might attract more disagreeable visitors than his last one did. First picketing his horse, he lay down within a short distance, depending upon the animal's sagacity to arouse him in case of danger.

The beast had already given such evidence as to make it certain that no foe, however wary, could approach without exciting his alarm. Invoking, as usual, the protection of Heaven, Nat closed his eyes in slumber. He had precaution enough, however, to collect a large quantity of wood, so that in case he should need a fire during the night, he would not be at a loss to obtain it.

Just before closing his eyes, he was startled by hearing among the mountains a long, peculiar cry—a sort of lengthened, tremulous howl of the most dismal tone. Although he had heard nothing like it before, he judged it to proceed from the dreaded mountain-wolf. He listened awhile, and hearing no repetition, closed his eyes, little dreaming that the

trail of his horse was the occasion of the ominous sound.

A half-hour later, he was brought to his feet by the most appalling cry that ever pierced his ears. There was something so unearthly—so horrible about it, that for a time he was completely unnerved. It was that sound which his horse had given in the agony of extreme fear; and not even the wild yells of the mountain-wolves, that followed it, were so fearful.

Nat found his horse rearing and tugging at his rope, his eyes fixed and glowing, and his body quivering with fear. He approached him, and after a time succeeded in partly pacifying him, and then looked around to ascertain the cause of his alarm. Nothing was visible, although the moon enabled him to see quite a distance. About twenty feet away he noticed a stump, around which he deemed it best to start his fire, as he believed the fright of his horse was occasioned by some animal lurking in the vicinity. Accordingly, he gathered an armful of fuel and tossed it toward the stump. His surprise was unbounded when he saw what he supposed to be a stump rise to its feet, with a threatening growl, and spring back several yards, where it resolutely confronted him.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Nat, with a start. "Who thought you were a sneaking wolf? I took you for a stump, and thought that growl a stump-speech. See how you like that!"

He did not miss his aim this time. The wolf doubled up like a steel-trap, uttering a dying howl, that was answered by a hundred throats from the mountain. Admonished by this fearful warning, Nat soon had a brisk fire burning, and enough wood piled beside it to keep it going until morning. He then led his horse up to it, so as to be out of reach of any animal, and loading his rifle waited for his visitors.

The place which he had chosen for his camping-ground was, as said, a sort of hollow or depression which so concealed his fire as to prevent its being seen until one was directly upon it. The death-howl of the wolf near him was still echoed by others, and it was easy to tell by the sounds that they were signaling to each other, and were rapidly centering around the spot which contained their dead companion. In a moment, Nat saw through the smoke a pair of glowing eyes fixed upon him, and a lengthened whine, terminating in a sharp yelp, brought a score of others almost instantly to their side.

Matters were certainly beginning to look serious, but Nat, knowing the dread which every animal has of fire, felt that if watchful and vigilant, there was no personal danger. His only fear was that the terror of his horse would become so great as to make him uncontrollable, and he would burst across the prairie and be lost forever to him.

The wolves continued to increase in number until it seemed that several hundred were gathered on the bank above. The first intruder, whose death was the penalty of his temerity, was seized by the foremost of the others and devoured in a twinkling. This served only to increase their thirst for blood, and they became doubly furious and venturesome. Although Nat held his horse so close to the fire as to scorch them both, a huge wolf made several leaps, and snapped his jaws so close that his animal sprung into the flame to escape him. He instantly leaped out again, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he could be restrained. The wolf, encouraged by his success, endeavored to get at the horse's heels so as to hamstring him. Lying down on his face, he crawled within a foot or two and then made a spring; but the horse seemed to understand his intention, and, quick as was the movement of the

wolf, he encountered the heels of the animal with such force as to split his head open and scatter his brains to the wind. The wolf, while yet quivering in the throes of death, was pounced upon by his companions as usual, and torn limb from limb!

Nat was struck with admiration at this exploit of his horse, and determined to attempt the same thing himself. He waited until another huge fellow had ventured rather close, when he stepped forward and gave a furious kick, closing the animal's jaws like the spring of a steel-trap. But before he could withdraw his foot it was seized by several with such power as to bring him upon his back, and he felt that he was being drawn away from the fire by the infuriated beasts!

"Murder! let go, can't you?" he shouted, clutching madly about him, and still retaining the halter of his horse. In his frantic movements he seized a firebrand and hurled it blazing among the swarming bodies. His foot was freed instantly, and the wolves retreated several yards, but immediately returned. Before they reached him, he was on his feet again, and too close to the fire for them to reach him.

"Confound it! I wished I'd gone home with Bill

Relmond, instead of coming out here like a fool to hunt up that squaw of an Irene Merment!" exclaimed Nat. "I might better have staid home, any way."

But regrets could avail nothing; and, to use a common expression, he was "in for it," and compelled to make the best of what seemed a bad affair just at present. It now occurred to him to attempt an expedient which he remembered hearing the trapper, Biddon, mention as having been used by himself in a similar case. Raising his rifle at random, he fired into the group. It was almost impossible to miss killing one, and a sharp yelp showed that he had not failed. The slain wolf followed the fate of the others, and was devoured with as much gusto as though he had been Nat Todd himself. As soon as the latter could reload, he discharged his gun again. This time the bullet plowed its way through the haunch of one wolf, and buried itself in the head of another. The latter, not noticing his own hurt, sprung upon the fallen one. Before this one was fairly devoured, several scented the blood of the wounded one, and although he was as active and powerful as the rest, he was borne down to the earth by a score of ravenous ones, and quickly dispatched.

Nat fired over twenty shots into the herd, and more than that number fell victims; and still it seemed to have no effect save to whet the appetite of the others. Several more were slain, when the hunter noticed his ammunition was getting low. Prudence compelled him, therefore, to desist from his work of slaughter. With much care he reloaded his rifle, determined to use it again only as a last resort. But the fury and courage of the wolves had so increased, that he saw some other expedient must be resorted to, or his life would not be his own in a half-hour. He threw several firebrands among them. This always scattered them for a moment; but it could not be continued, for the good reason that it must deprive him of his fire, and thus make his case entirely hopeless.

As an additional means of defense he kindled another fire, and finally had four in full blast, so that he was inclosed in a circle of flame. This served every purpose, and no matter how great the hunger or temerity of the wolves, not one durst venture over the magic boundary. A feeling of relief and security now came over Nat, and he congratulated himself upon having foiled the insatiate brutes at last.

But it was not long before this emotion of relief gave way to that of sickly terror. He saw that his fuel could possibly last still morning. A couple of hours more at the most, and it must die out. Nat, in despair, looked up to the heavens, and saw by the constellations that it was hardly midnight.

Several times he revolved a desperate scheme in his mind; it was to mount his horse and start off on a full run. It seemed the only hope left, and yet a second thought told him it would be certain destruction. Impeded with his weight, the horse must finally succumb and fall a victim. The lank, cadaverous wolves were capable of worrying any animal of the prairie to death; and the most terrific speed to which the horror of death could urge his animal would preserve him but an hour or so. No; he dismissed this plan, satisfied that it could avail him nothing.

Hour after hour gradually wore away, and the fires slumbered low. With feelings which none can imagine, our hero threw the last stick upon the fire! As yet no hope of escape dawned upon him!

Up to this time the yells and clamor of the wolves had been deafening; but Nat all at once noticed that they had ceased, and the silence of death

"'Now howl as long as you want to,' shouted Nat."

reigned over the scene. Some great fear had fallen upon them, and they now dashed away in a tumultuous drove, leaving the hunter entirely alone with his horse.

"Some greater danger, if possible, threatens!" he exclaimed.

Scarcely had he spoken when he caught the outlines of a colossal form above him, and saw instantly that a grizzly bear was approaching. His horse caught sight of the brute at the same moment, and, with a wild yell, broke from him and dashed across the prairie, his mane streaming in the wind. The bear instantly followed, on a loping, tumbling gait, and Nat's heart thrilled as he saw he was entirely alone.

"Now's my time!" he exclaimed, catching a brand and running up the embankment. He caught sight of a dim cluster of bushes or trees, several hundred yards ahead, and waving the brand above his head, made a desperate dash for the refuge. He had not gone one-half the distance when he was surrounded by a dozen wolves, who had been frightened from the pursuit of the horse by the appearance of the grizzly bear.

"Clear the track!" he shouted, in a sort of wild

ecstasy, as he swung the flaming missile around around him. The wolves fairly touched him, but the brand was all-potent. He reached the tree without a scratch. Here he was nonplussed for a moment. In one hand he held his rifle, and in the other the protecting torch, which his rapid run had fanned into a roaring blaze. It was impossible to climb the tree without dropping both. The hunter decided in a moment. Raising a loud shout, and waving the brand over his head, he sprung toward the wolves, scattering them like chaff. When they were a few rods distant, he flung the dreaded flame directly among them, and leaping back to the tree, dropped his gun and made a bound upward, catching a limb and sustaining himself by one hand. Over this he threw his feet, and was twisting himself over it, when, as if fate was against him, the limb broke and he came to the ground again. Nothing disconcerted, he made another leap, and catching again, brought his body up among the limbs. But so close were the wolves, and so narrow the escape the last time, that he found himself lightened of a large part of his hunting-shirt, it being in the teeth of the greedy cannibals below.

"Now howl as long as you want to!" shouted

Nat, as he clambered up the tree and perched himself in the very top. "I'll bet I won't fall asleep to-night, and you'll wait a while before you breakfast off of me." *

* To avoid giving a false impression, we may state that the wolf of the West will never attack a person unless the latter has the smell of fresh blood about him. They will follow a traveler for mlles, keeping up their dismal howling, but he is perfectly safe so long as there is no fresh wound upon him, or meat in his possession. But a few drops of blood will draw the wolves from miles distant to the trail. In the incident above given, the fury of these animals was caused by a small wound in the horse's foot which had left its mark in several places.

CHAPTER V.

WHICH IS MOSTLY HISTORICAL.

NEVER did shipwrecked mariner hail the sight of morning with greater joy and thankfulness than did Nat Todd the first glimpse of day in the east. As the sun appeared above the horizon, the wolves, one by one, shrunk away, until none remained. Seeing the coast clear, Nat ventured to descend. He found his rifle full fifty feet away from the tree, where it had been clawed and disfigured by the ravenous animals. It had suffered no material injury, however, and he was glad enough to recover it as it was. From the situation of the sun he was able to tell what direction to take to reach the Fort, and without losing any time in useless repinings, he started off on foot.

He traveled on until noon, when he shot a bird, which furnished him with a hearty dinner. He was never at loss for a fire, as his flint furnished the means; and the weather was so cool this day, that he could not resist the pleasure of enjoying it for a while. Unconsciously to himself he fell into

a deep slumber, and did not awaken until dark. Startled at his indiscretion, he sprung on, resolved to travel the most of the night to make up for lost ground.

The prairie continued mostly of the rolling kind; and, aided by the faint light of the moon and stars, he made considerable progress. Several streams were crossed, and finally a sort of grove, of perhaps a half-mile in extent, was entered. A cold, chilling fear crept over our hero as the dark shades encompassed him; and it was in no way lessened when he heard the footsteps of some animal behind him. In fact, we doubt whether there is a more uncomfortable sensation a person can experience, than the consciousness that some one or something is dogging his footsteps in the dark. The suppressed step, followed by a treacherous silence—the imaginary approach of a foe, and the expected blow, make the suspense harder to bear than the danger itself. At intervals, the rustle of the leaves sounded closer and closer, until he was so wrought upon by fear that he could stand it no longer. Cocking his rifle, he dodged aside, and concealing himself behind a tree, waited the approach of his foe. Closer and closer sounded the suspicious footsteps, until, all at once, not a wild animal or a human foe —but his horse walked directly in front of him.

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Nat, fervently. "This is the most fortunate thing that could have happened."

The horse seemed as much delighted as his master, and when he once more felt him upon his back, he seemed unable to restrain himself.

"Now you may go till you're tired," said Nat, as he emerged into the open prairie. The horse, with a neigh of delight, straightened his limbs and sped away like a swallow. His rider ceased wondering at his escape from the wolves and bear when he saw with what speed he was carried.

With now and then an occasional halt for rest and refreshment, the journey was continued until noon of the next day, when he crossed a large stream of cold, sparkling water, and several hours later he discerned in the distance the plain of Brown's Hole. He struck his horse into a canter at sight of it, and moving through the bluffs, crossed two smaller streams that tumbled down from the stratified cliffs on his right. After passing a few rods further, the whole area burst upon his sight. A man dressed like a hunter stood in front of the Fort, amusing himself with the antics of a couple of dogs. He caught sight of our hero and turned toward him. Nat found himself the recipient of a hearty welcome, and felt that he had

stumbled upon something like *home* in the wilderness.

"Brown's Hole is one of the most remarkable forts on the Pacific slope. It was once termed "Fort David Crockett," but it is now more generally known by the former name. It stands on the Sheetskadee or Prairie Cock river, and is more than a mile and a half above the sea-level.* The plain upon which it is situated is about six miles across, and is walled in completely by a chain of mountains rising fifteen hundred feet above. The Sheetskadee enters the plain from the northwest side, and sweeping round in a beautiful curve in front of the Fort, makes its way through the mountain-cliffs full a thousand feet in height, where it moves over with a solemn calmness that is indescribable.

Not the least remarkable peculiarity of this plain is its climate. Forming a plateau, as it does, over eight thousand feet in height, one would suppose an eternal winter to hold reign. On the contrary, the rich mountain-grasses, with numerous copses of willow and cotton wood, are growing the entire year; and when the blasts of winter whirl the snow in blinding drifts over the mountain-peaks and in the country around, the horses of the hunters may be seen calmly cropping the herbage on the banks of

* This stream is now marked on maps as Green river.

the Sheetskadee, and the hunters themselves are in the height of enjoyment.

The Fort some years since was a hollow square of log-cabins, with the roofs and floors constructed of mud. Around the outside were numerous Indian lodges, where the families of the white trappers remained while the latter were absent among the mountains or beaver-runs. Many of the Shoshonè or Snake tribe are found at the Fort. They appear in the largest numbers during the winter months, when they bring large quantities of the meat of the mountain-sheep and other animals, which they furnish to the travelers and traders in exchange for beads, trinkets, ammunition, etc. A store-house also stands outside, where the trappers barter their furs, and the Indians their horses, for hatchets, knives, fishooks, lead and whisky.

The Shoshonès, are the nearest assimilated to the whites, and during the winter months the whole tribe, numbering considerably over a thousand, pitch their lodges on the plain around the Fort; while scores of trappers and hunters congregate within the Fort, or among their Indians squaws, and a scene of enjoyment, such as is rarely witnessed, takes place. There are gatherings among the Indian lodges, where both races congregate, while moccasins, buffalo-robes and "leggins" are sewn

with deer-sinews. The wild song of the dusky warriors is heard; and there is dancing, and music, and love-making, and marriage—all that go to make up life, where, for the time being, the participants give way to social pleasure. And many is the thrilling legend related by some hunter, who, perhaps, has hunted for years on snow-shoes in Prince Rupert's Land, or penetrated to the Frozen Sea for seals and walruses; many is the escape narrated by the trapper, who has stealthily secured his peltries on the shores of the far-off Columbia, or among the wildest fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains, in spite of the treacherous Blackfeet or Flatheads.

Nat arrived at the most unfortunate time at the Fort. It being in early summer, the only white men were the store-keeper and three or four hunters who chanced to be in the neighborhood for a few days.

"If you seek any of the hunters, you will have to wait till autumn. The men are off hunting, some of them hundreds of miles distant. They'll be in, perhaps, in the course of several months, before starting off for the beaver-runs."

This information was given by the trader, after our hero had been within the place an hour or so, and had explained his object in appearing in that part of the world at such a time.

"Do you know anything of a fellow called Oregon Sol?" he inquired.

"Old Sol Jagzin, you mean? Ah—yes. No man except Kit Carson is so well known this side of the Mississippi."

"Where is he now?"

"That's a question I cannot answer, and I doubt whether any one else can except the individual himself. I haven't seen him in a long time."

"How long since he has been here?"

"Let me see: he hasn't been in these parts this year. The last time was winter before last. He was here only a day or two, just long enough to dispose of his peltries, and lay in a supply of tobacco and ammunition, when he was off again. I expected him down last winter, but he failed to appear."

"What do you suppose the reason to be? Have no idea that he has collapsed—been killed, I mean?"

"I hardly suppose that, and yet it may be true after all. Sol is a most experienced Indian fighter and hunter, and after going through such a course of training as he has, it isn't likely he'd go under at this time of life; but then a trapper's life is a hob-nob with Death, and though the latter must win at last, he does it sometimes sooner than is expected.

However," added the trader, with a more cheerful air, "I have little fear for Sol."

"What reason then do you give for his absence when you expected him?"

"One reason is this: he traps somewhere up in Oregon, no one knows where, for he always goes alone. Since we Americans have got hold of Oregon, the emigrants have commenced coming in there, especially during the last few years. This has made the beavers somewhat scarcer, and Sol, like enough, did not secure sufficient furs to make him think it worth while to come down at the usual time. So he thought he would lie over for a season."

"Did you ever hear him say anything of the lovely girl that I have been speaking about?"

"Now that you have referred to it, it occurs to me that I have—but only once, and that was the time of which Tom Langdon spoke. I distinctly remember his relating the incident, just as you say it was told you. It excited my curiosity somewhat, and I made several inquiries of Sol, as well as of others who have been in Oregon. But neither he nor any one else could give any additional information."

"Do you suppose this lovely gal to be living?"

"I can only conjecture, which you can do your-

self. I should not despair of finding her alive and well until I received indubitable evidence that she was dead."

"I don't suppose any one besides this Sol could give me any information which I seek?"

"No; it is hardly probable. You see, it might be termed an accident by which he obtained his knowledge, and I doubt very much whether he could tell you any more than I have."

Nat was somewhat discouraged, but not entirely disheartened by what the trader told him. His first impulse was to start for Oregon at once; but second thought told him that such a course could avail nothing. By a singularly good fortune, he believed he had obtained a clue to what he sought; and that patience and perseverance were only needed to follow it up to a successful termination. It was now early summer, and he concluded to remain at the Fort until the arrival of Sol Jagzin, or until it was known that he would not make his appearance.

The time passed heavily to the ardent fellow. Day after day dragged by, and week after week, until several months were past. Still there were no signs of the hunter's return. Several trappers made their appearance at intervals, and remaining a day or two, took their departure. Once or twice large

bodies of the Shoshone visited the store-house, and, bartering with the trader, rode away again. Toward the middle of summer a distinguished Russian traveler, accompanied by an American, remained several days at Brown's Hole. Nat made their acquaintance at once, and the time passed pleasantly during their stay. The three had several hunting and fishing expeditions together, and our hero was thrown into ecstasies when the American informed him that he was a friend of Relmond, and had met him in St. Louis on his return from the Yellowstone. Besides this, Relmond and Imogene, having a faint hope that the traveler would chance to come across Nat, had dispatched their best wishes for his safety. Relmond, as before mentioned, had determined not to let Imogene know the true cause of Nat's erratic expedition, for fear that it might awaken hopes which could only occasion the keener disappointment.

After the departure of his two friends, Nat found time hang more heavily than ever upon his hands. He frequently spent days in rambling over the mountains, hunting the different game that so abounded. He wondered why the hunters should go to great distances to seek their prey when there was such an abundance at their doors. But no signs

of beaver and otter were seen in proximity to the Fort.

Finally the summer departed. Cold, blustering autumn made its appearance. The trader informed Nat that the trappers might be looked for every day. Indeed, the same week several came in. But no one brought tidings of "Oregon Sol."

A fortnight after this, when the Shoshonès pitched their lodges around the Fort, and over thirty trappers and hunters were on the ground, Nat received notice that a great party would be held that evening, which, of course, it was expected he would attend. No refusal could be expected, and there was little danger of any being offered.

At the appointed time they all assembled in the lodge which had been prepared expressly for the purpose. The oily lights disclosed a singular and characteristic scene. There were old, weather-beaten hunters, shaggy and scarred, lithe, graceful warriors, and maidens of all shades, from the dusky hue of the autumn-leaf to the pure Caucasian. All ages, from the mere youth to he man of three-score and ten were seen. Wives, husbands, brothers, sisters and lovers mingled together. There were a couple of "professors" on the violin, so that abundant music was furnished. All went into the sport as if they relished it. Some danced as finely as if

made of Damascus steel; some bounced square up and down; others shoved themselves around with a slow, solemn motion; while some shot hither and thither, like balls of India-rubber.

Late in the night Nat found himself *tête-à-tète* with a beautiful half-breed. While engaged in an earnest talk, she suddenly exclaimed:

"Yonder is old Solomon, I declare!"

Nat saw, at the opposite end of the room, a short, stumpy-looking fellow, clad in the garb of a trapper, and around whom were congregated a number of both sexes. A moment later, the trader touched Nat on the shoulder and whispered:

"That's Oregon Sol. He is in an unusual good humor to-night. I spoke of you to him, and he says he will see you in the morning. Be frank and to the point with him, and I think you will have no difficulty in gaining all the information you wish."

It was near morning before the party broke up. In spite of the exciting expectation which Nat felt relating to Oregon Sol, it must be confessed he slept soundly until near the middle of the forenoon. As soon as he awoke, he repaired to the warehouse to see the trader. He found not only him, but Oregon Sol, who had just disposed of his furs, and secured his winter-stock of ammunition and stores. The trader introduced the two at once. We will not

detail the tedious conversation to which Nat was compelled to submit before he obtained his information, but give the substance of what he learned. The old trapper was whimsical and eccentric, and it required the combined skill of the trader and Nat, before he divulged what little he knew. He stated, substantially, what Langdon had already given, pointing out only in addition the precise location of the place in the Blue Mountains at which he was visited by the "lovely maiden," and stating that the Indians belonged to the Cayuse tribe. The place where he was attacked was just above the canon of a stream which debouched into Lewis river. Nat, who possessed a thorough knowledge of the geography of the country, traced out the very stream on a map in the possession of the trader, and gained such an idea of the country as to make him confident of his ability to reach it alone; but he counted much on the assistance of the old, terrible-looking trapper.

It was, then, with the sorest disappointment that he learned that Oregon Sol was not going to return again to Oregon. He had obtained information from a friendly Cayuse of a region literally swarming with beaver and otter, to which the two were going in company. He would not disclose its location, save to say it was in an entirely different direc-

tion, and hundreds of miles from the Blue Mountains. Nat used every inducement at his command to get the trapper to change his intention, or at least to postpone it until another season; but it availed nothing. As a class, no men are more stubborn than those western, half-civilized rangers. If any there are, it is those from the Eastern States.

"Jerusalem! I'll go alone, and secure her if there are ten million enemies in the path!" exclaimed a man belonging to the latter class.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH A HAUL IS MADE CONTAINING A MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

WHEN a person comes to an unexpected resolution, his first impulse is pretty sure to be to carry it out at once; and undue haste is almost equally sure to characterize his movements.

A half-hour subsequent to the exclamation recorded in the last chapter, Nat Todd, well mounted and armed, was riding at a brisk canter toward the North. Brown's Hole and its swarming population already were invisible behind the mighty cliffs that walled it in from the outer world. The trader, at first, opposed this erratic course, but was compelled to admit at last that it was the only one left to him. None of the trappers present in the Fort were going to the same section; and, as there were none who would consent to lose a season for the purpose of aiding in what could be of little profit or interest

to themselves, it will be seen that the course of Nat was perhaps the best under the circumstances.

He determined to follow the Oregon trail to Fort Hall, about two hundred miles distant, on Lewis river. Having thoroughly posted himself, during his stay at Brown's Hole, on the difficulties of the journey, he apprehended no trouble, except it might be from the Blackfeet, whose war-parties often hovered around this highway. For something over a dozen miles he kept up the valley of the Sheetskadee, one of the most beautiful rivers in the Far West. The water of this river was clear as air, of uniform breadth, and in no place over three feet in depth. The mountains rose on either side to the height of a thousand feet above the level of the stream. He camped at night on the bank of this river, and at an early hour resumed his journey.

Nat had taken the precaution of furnishing himself with a goodly quantity of meat before starting, as the trader informed him that he was about to enter a desert, where the probabilities of obtaining food by the aid of his gun would be slight indeed. A few miles from his camping-place, he reached a point in the mountains through which the river wore its way in such a manner as to make a cañon,

and, for the distance of five miles, he was compelled to clamber over frightful precipices, along brinks of yawning caverns, and over paths not more than a foot in width, where there was nothing save the naked face of the rock to cling to, and where a single misstep would be instant destruction. But his Indian horse was as firm and sure-footed as the trained mules of the Andes.

The day passed without affording him a glimpse of a single human being. The only signs of animal life, besides himself and his horse, were a few croaking ravens and magpies that circled overhead and gave their dismal welcome to this desolate region. His camping-place afforded a view of the Anahuac Range, which stretched away in the direction of the Great Salt Lake. He expected to encounter no white persons, unless it might be one or two trappers, as the season was one in which few, if any, emigrants braved the perils of the mountains. The next morning he continued his journey in a northern direction, over a sort of rolling plain of coarse, sandy gravel, upon which no sign of vegetation, save the forbidding wild wormwood, was observed. One or two miserable-looking prairie-wolves were espied in the course of the afternoon.

They slunk along the river-bottoms, giving vent, now and then, to a howl which echoed like a wail of death from cliff to cliff. As if to increase the gloom of this desert, a flock of famished ravens followed him for a long distance, chanting their discordant notes and darkening the air with their funereal wings.

On the afternoon of the fourth day, the adventurer struck Ham's Fork, a tributary of the Sheetskadee. At this season the river was quite shallow, but during the spring it is over two hundred feet in depth.

His journey was a long and often tedious one; but there were many natural curiosities encountered, which sometimes served to interest him for a time. Among these were the remarkable Steamboat and Soda Springs, the Three Buttes, and the Valley of Chasms.

He underwent much suffering from the scarcity of food, and upon several occasions his horse became so weakened as to be unable to carry him. Had he been aware of the formidable journey he had undertaken, his enthusiasm would have failed to carry him through. But on the tenth day he ascended a high ridge, which afforded him a view of the great

southern branch of the Columbia. Far to the northward, in the land of the Shoshonè, could be seen the Three Buttes looming up in the sky, while to the southwest stretched a rugged chain of mountains. But, a more cheering sight than all, there was Fort Hall, nestling down in the plain, its white battlements glowing like burnished silver in the clear sunlight.

In a couple of hours he drew rein in front of the Fort, shouting for those inside to come forth. Instantly an armed man made his appearance who gave him welcome.

"Got anything to eat?" asked Nat. "I'm terribly hungry. Do you think you've got enough to satisfy me?"

The guard surveyed the strange comer with a quiet smile, and then replied:

"If you doubt it, come in and try it. Come, come, man, don't sit there; you're not serving your horse right."

"That is true—nor myself either," answered Nat, hurrying within the gate.

The hospitality offered him was the most genuine and hearty. His horse was well taken care of, and himself feasted like a prince. Within he found

quite a collection of hunters and trappers. At the conclusion of his meal he arose and remarked:

"Gentlemen, if there is a man in this company who feels perfectly satisfied for the present, that man is Nat Todd."

"Nat Todd, did you say?" questioned the man who had welcomed him to the Fort, as he arose and came toward him.

"The same, sir, at your service."

"There is a letter here for Nathan Todd."

"A letter for me?" he repeated, catching his breath, and feeling a sudden loathing of the food he had just swallowed.

"Yes, sir; I will give it you in a minute. In fact, I believe we have two, if I am not mistaken."

"My gracious! who has written me letters? Can't be it's the lovely maiden I'm looking for. She hain't learned my address yet."

In a moment two letters were placed in his hand. One was plump and heavy, and a glance at the superscription showed Nat it was from his widowed mother. A mist floated before his eyes as he tremblingly broke the seal, and his heart fairly leaped while perusing it. It was a hopeful letter, such as an affectionate mother would write to the

eldest of four grown-up sons, breathing prayerfully of his fate, and containing a few words from each of the "children," and giving, as a part of the gossip, the fact his Alminy had married Bill Hankins shortly after the departure of Nat for the West.

"Just what I expected!" remarked Nat aloud. "I might have known that, when she coaxed me so hard to go to California—though I was such a fool that I thought she did it out of pure, genuine love. Never mind; wait till I take this lovely maiden home that I am going to find up among the mountains. I'll show her candy she can't suck!"

The letter closed with an earnest wish for Nat to come home. The farm was large enough to support all, and the fond mother could not see the necessity for even one of her children leaving the dear old home. Nat folded up his letter, resolved to spend a day in answering it, and to promise to return home the next summer.

He glanced at the next envelope, but failed to recognize the handwriting. The wonder with which he broke the seal was increased to literal amazement when he read it. The contents were as follows:

"To NATHAN TODD:—Follow the trail to Burnt River, and then strike off to the northwest to the Blue Mountains. The one for whom you are looking is in the possession of the Cayuse tribe."

"Jerusalem! who wrote that letter?" he demanded, looking around him. There was no signature to it, nor anything besides his own name upon the envelope.

"Where did you get that letter?" he repeated, turning toward the friend who had welcomed him to the Fort.

"It was left here about two months since by a man who rode into the Fort, the same as you have, on horseback, and from the same direction."

"What was his name?"

"He did not inform us."

"What did he look like?"

"There was nothing about his appearance that seemed unusual that I am aware of. He remained over night. In the evening, he wrote that letter, and told me to hand it to you when you reached here, which he said would probably be in a month from that time."

"Why, it beat's all! How did he know any-

thing of me, much less of the lovely maiden for whom I am searching? You do not know where he came from?"

"From the States, I suppose, although I am not certain."

"Know where he was going?"

"No, sir; yet I suspect it was to California."

"Tell me how he was dressed—how he looked."

The man laughed outright, at Nat's eagerness.

"Had I suspected this anxiety upon your part, I should have certainly made this mysterious person leave his name, at least, with us. He rode upon a coal-black pony—was dressed in such a manner as to show he was from more civilized regions than are found this side of the Mississippi. His hair was long and dark, his face clean shaven, with handsome, regular features."

Nat thought deeply upon what his friend had just related, but could bring up no remembrance of having ever seen a person who bore the slightest resemblance to the one just mentioned; and, since leaving the Yellowstone, he had met no horse similar to the one referred to. For a long time he thought of nothing else, and puzzled himself greatly to solve the riddle. He re-read the note a half-dozen times,

and made his friend repeat the description nearly as often. He questioned three others who had seen the man, but none could add anything to what had already been told. At last, he was compelled to give up the hope of finding out who the unknown could be. The whole affair was a mystery. It was destined to remain so a long time to him.

The afternoon was spent in writing home. He gave a whole account of his adventures, not omitting to state that he was in pursuit of a "lovely maiden," as far superior to Alminy as the sun was to the moon; and hinting the probability of his making his appearance in Lubec the next season, with her as his bride. He closed with a glowing account of his health, which, under the invigorating climate of the Far West had become rugged and settled, and urging his mother to feel no anxiety upon his account. The letter finished, he handed it to his friend, who promised that it should be sent eastward as soon as opportunity offered.

The entire night was passed by Nat in meditating upon the future. The advice of the note he held in his hand corresponded with that of Oregon Sol, and he had no doubts that both were correct; but he felt, at that moment, that he would give all he owned in the world if it would be the means of explaining the mystery of the letter. It was inexplicable.

How a man whom he had never seen, and in a region which he had never visited, could know the object which brought him hither, was incomprehensible.

"At any rate, I'll *go*. '*Follow the trail to Burnt River,*' it says, and then '*strike off to the Blue Mountains.*' That course will take me to the very spot which Oregon Sol mentioned; and then it says that the Cayuse tribe hold her. The same thing was stated by both, and of course *must* be true. It's a long journey, but Nat Todd has not come all this distance to turn back at his place. No, sir! The trail which he has started upon must be followed to the end."

Nat remained at the Fort a couple of days in order to recruit himself and horse. He made the acquaintance of all those within it, but gained no additional knowledge of what most concerned him. Fort Hall was built in the year 1832, by a man from Boston, for the purpose of opening trade with the Indians in the vicinity. At this time the nearest post of the Hudson Bay Company was seven hundred miles distant, and he had little fear of competition from them. But this wealthy firm, with its vast resources, soon forced him to leave. Fort Boise was instantly established on Reid river, and the British company sent out scores of their agents,

who literally surrounded the unfortunate American, and by underselling him in everything, in a short time compelled him to "break," and sell out his Fort, at a great sacrifice, to the Hudson Bay Company. The course of the latter body in this affair may strike the reader as dishonorable; but, if he will reflect a moment, he will see that nothing was done by them which is not practiced around us every day. It was but fair competition, and the American Fur Company, as well as many others, amply retaliated in time. Long after Oregon fell into the hands of the Americans, the Hudson Bay Company claimed and held the right of trade within its territory. With a short-sightedness which is unaccountable, our Government allowed this claim, and to this day the British reap the benefit of it.*

It was a pleasant morning in autumn when Nat Todd emerged from Fort Hall, and turned his face toward the northward. It would be tedious to the

* The treaty of 1846, says: "The possessory rights of the Hudson Bay Company, and of all British subjects who may be already in occupation of the land or other property lawfully acquired within said territory, shall be respected." Gen. Harney maintained that the right of this company to exclusive trade on the Northwest Coast, expired in May, 1859, and took possession of one of their forts. The members of the British company left under protest, and it is but a short time since that the trouble was satisfactorily adjusted.

reader were we to follow our hero step by step until he reached the Blue Mountains. His journey to Fort Boise was much the same as the one from Brown's Hole. An hour's ride brought him to the limit of vegetation. The earth became of a red, fiery color, covered here and there with shriveled cottonwoods and shrubs, and with barely sufficient grass to keep his animal from starving. He passed close to the celebrated "Three Buttes." These are pyramidal-shaped peaks, two thousand feet in height. Their tops were covered with glittering snow; further down, small streams issue forth, and bands of vegetation encircle these peaks to the base, giving, during the summer months, a most beautiful exhibition of the different zones of the earth. Eight days of constant terror from the roving Indians—of painful traveling over the knife-like stones—over black, barren swells—through a vast, untimbered country—sometimes fording the river besides which the trail led—sometimes camping on the hard-baked earth—at others beside the softly rippling river—at times ready to give way to despair, and turn back—at others renewed by hope—eight days of such travel as this, and one afternoon a solitary horseman, scarcely resembling Nathan Todd, drew up in front of Fort Boise.

A week's stay at Fort Boise was sufficient to put

Nat and his beast in the best of spirits and condition. He found the hospitality of its inhabitants as genuine and cordial as those of the other posts, and left them with many expressions of regret.

The country over which he now journeyed steadily improved in appearance. A short distance from the Fort, he came upon a number of springs whose waters were much better than those of the Steamboat Spring. At night, he encamped upon the northern bank of the Malheur, a tributary of Lewis, which put in from the western side. The next day he continued still upon the Great Trail. Far to the west, in a parallel direction with his own, he could discern the peaks of the Blue Range, stretching far along the sky. At night he reached Burnt River, a stream as cold and limpid as a mountain-spring. It was at his point he was to "strike off" to the west. The night was a clear moonlight one, and he continued his journey a long time, until stopped by the wild character of the region. In the morning, an hour after starting, he reached a broad belt of prairie, stretching away to the very base of the mountains. Here his horse relapsed into a deliberate walk, while he fell into a deep and lasting reverie. This musing fit might have continued a long time had it not been interrupted by the sudden whiz of something before his eyes.

"Hello! what's that?" he exclaimed, looking around him. Just ahead he saw the barb of an arrow sticking out of the earth, and behind, scarcely a furlong distant, nearly a dozen Indians running toward him with the speed of the wind!

CHAPTER VII.

PROVING THAT IT IS NOT ALWAYS BEST TO LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP.

ONE glance was enough for our hero to see that discretion was the better part of valor. One loud yell, and his horse, with a wild snort, sprung forward like a racer. The flaunting apparel of the savage seemed to alarm the latter as much as his rider, and he needed no urging to flee. The Indians discharged another flight of arrows, and giving vent to their chilling war-whoop, sprung with renewed speed after the fugitive.

"Blazes! I think this is a mean trick!" muttered Nat, glancing furtively over his shoulder. "I should like to know what they've got against me and my hoss. Never mind, they've got to dig gravel fast to overtake me in this race."

The speed with which the Indians ran was wonderful, but it could not be expected that it

should match with that of the horse. He was a noble animal, and skimmed over the ground with great velocity. The distance between the pursuer and pursued so rapidly lengthened, that the latter began to hope the race would be shortly resigned by those who held it at such disadvantage. Already beyond the reach of the strongest bow, it was with a peculiar relief that he observed the savages had no firearms. He was in a region seldom visited by the whites, and where, from all appearances, the red-men were determined such a state of affairs should continue as long as possible.

The trepidation with which this race of life and death was commenced by Nat Todd, all at once became terror, when he saw that the prairie over which he was flying terminated a mile or two ahead. At that point the ground assumed an uneven, rocky character, which increased until it was literally composed of gorges, caverns and precipices! Through these it was impossible to force his animal at a faster gait than a common walk.

"By gracious! things begin to look squally! Come, hoss, you must go it while you can."

If it were late in the day, Nat would have had more hope; but it was early in the forenoon, and

the relentless savages had a long time in which to secure their victim.

When the latter reached the end of the small prairie, he sprung from the saddle, and, giving his horse free rein, plunged in among the rocks to keep up his flight on foot. He indulged in one fearful glance behind him, and saw his pursuers a third of a mile distant, shouting and gesticulating furiously, as they deemed he was as well as secured.

"The more haste the less speed," is an adage whose force was never so distinctly shown as in the present case. Nat's only thought was a wild desire to go ahead, and he scarcely heeded the means by which this was to be gained. He plunged madly around rocks, pitching headlong into unseen hollows and stumbling over boulders, and all the time it seemed to his tormented brain that he was absolutely gaining no ground at all. In the midst of his flight, he unexpectedly found himself between two huge rocks that rose far above him and extended quite a distance in front, gradually narrowing until the opening at the opposite end seemed hardly large enough to admit the passage of his body. He deemed it would be too great a loss of time to turn back and run around, and determined to take a start

and *make* his body go through. Stepping back a foot or so, he drew in a deep breath and ran with all his might. As he felt his arms brushing the rocks, he concentrated his strength and made one desperate, frenzied leap, intending to pass clean through. The consequence was, he found himself immovably wedged in between the walls!

"Fast, as sure as I live!" he gasped, endeavoring to force himself out again. But it was of no use; the force with which he had driven himself forward was so great that no strength of his could extricate him. He kicked and twisted, and tried to push the rocks a little further apart, but it was unavailing.

"Oh! I'm lost!" he mourned. "The Indians will be here in a minute and have my scalp. That derned old Irene is the cause of this. It it hadn't been for her I wouldn't have been here. *I'll kill* her if I ever see her!"

Nat's words are perhaps excusable when we consider his circumstances. The fair lost-one was certainly the primary cause of his getting into the present difficulty, although, of course, entirely blameless.

He was compelled, at last, to cease his exhaustive efforts and listen. He expected, every moment, to

see the forms of a dozen infuriated Indians rush upon him, or hear the twang of their bows as their arrows were aimed at his devoted head. But, as minute after minute passed away, and he heard no signs of them, a faint hope that they had lost all scent of him began to animate him, and he renewed his efforts to extricate himself. By exhausting his breath and doubling his efforts, he suddenly found, to his inexpressible joy, that he was free and on his feet once more.

Our hero now committed a blunder for which there was certainly no excuse. The result of his former haste should have been heeded. In the rocks around him there were plenty of places in which he could have concealed himself, where even the basilisk orb of an American Indian would have failed to detect his presence. He committed a blunder, we say; and yet, in the end, as is often the case, it proved one of the happiest efforts of his life. As no one could have suspected the singular termination, its short-sightedness was none the less.

He emerged cautiously from the rocks, and gazed about him. There were no signs of his pursuers; and, supposing they had been deceived, he determined to continue his flight toward the mountains.

He crept stealthily along a short distance, when he descried, a few rods ahead, and directly in his path, a huge gorge, too broad to leap, and extending, apparently, for miles to his right and left.

While debating how this new difficulty should be gotten over, two arrows shattered their heads upon the rock beside him, and an exulting whoop showed he was discovered. He glanced back and saw the forms of his enemies springing from rock to rock, and dodging in every imaginable manner to avoid his own shot. Retreat was impossible, as they were spreading themselves out like a fan so as to encompass him in his present position.

"Do or die, and the Lord help me!" he exclaimed, compressing his lips and preparing for the final effort.

It was a deed no sane man would have attempted or succeeded in. But terror—an absolute horror of falling into the Indians' hands—accomplished it. Drawing in his breath, Nat made several bounds forward, and as his foot reached the edge of the precipice, sprung out with superhuman strength! For an instant, his crouching form was seen in mid-air, and then disappeared! But he had succeeded in striking the opposite side, and, half-stunned by

the concussion, clambered to his feet and limped away.

The Indians paused in amazement at seeing the white man's wonderful leap. As he was lost to sight, they rushed forward expecting to see his mangled body far down the dreadful abyss. Reaching the edge, they caught a glimpse of him, several rods in advance, turning the corner of a projecting ledge. Their astonishment was unbounded, and they believed him to be a supernatural being. Not one of their number had the temerity to attempt the same feat.

A cold sweat broke out upon him as he realized he had cleared the frightful chasm, and his feeling of terror changed instantly to uncontrollable hatred of the savages, that they had forced him to such a desperate effort for life. He was so much bruised by the shock as to be barely able to limp behind the ledge alluded to. Here he sunk down, not even able to walk further. He peered cautiously around the corner of the rock, and saw his enemies standing in full view, talking and gesticulating as though engaged in some earnest argument. He examined the lock of his rifle, and, seeing that it still remained unharmed, brought it to his shoulder and pointed it toward the group. But the exhaustion of his system was so great as to throw his whole body into

such a tremor as to make him unable to draw sight on a single one. Failing in this, he lay flat on his face, and, resting it on the rock, aimed at the center of the group and fired.

"There's one imp rubbed out, curse him!" he muttered, as he saw a reeling savage caught in the arms of his companions and borne away.

By the time he managed to reload, not an Indian was visible. A bomb-shell could not have scattered them more effectually. Now was the time for him to continue his flight; but, besides being crippled, as stated, he felt an obstinate determination to make the Indians suffer for what they had done.

To understand the events which follow, it is necessary that we should digress for a moment, and explain more particularly our hero's situation.

The chasm which separated him from the Indians was one of those immense cracks or yawns which are often seen in the Far West, that were made at some remote age by an earthquake. He had leaped it at the narrowest spot, so that it was impossible for his enemies to reach him unless they used some artificial means to cross, or should *go round it.* It was not likely the latter course would be taken, as it would involve too great a loss of time; and Nat, accordingly, prepared to guard against the former stratagem.

For a half-hour not a sign of an Indian was seen. At the end of that time a branch fluttered for an instant in the air and then disappeared. He rose to his feet, and, looking carefully toward the suspicious point, finally detected a shaven head, the body of which was concealed. It was at a point lower down than the one where they were last seen; and before he could cover it with his aim, it was withdrawn. Still watching the same point, he soon noticed a piece of rock projecting, like the leaf of a table, from the opposite side. A closer scrutiny revealed the alarming fact that it was gradually crossing the chasm. It apparently moved without human aid, but no second thought was necessary to reveal the agents at work. Nat was satisfied that before they could accomplish anything they would be compelled to show themselves, when he determined to lodge a bullet somewhere among them. Feeling little fear from their arrows, he ascended the top of the rock, where he could have a view of their operations. His trepidation had given way to a settled calmness, and he seemed now to possess the most genuine courage. He vowed that, before the savages should cross the chasm, some of them should go to the bottom.

He sat in this position a few moments, without detecting any further movements of the ridge of

rock, when it occurred to him that his foes might be extending operations in another direction. It was well he took a second glance; for, as it was, it had well-nigh been his last. To his left were three Indians, and the very instant he turned toward them, the foremost had his arrow drawn to the head and pointed directly at Nat. As quick as thought, the latter turned a back-summerset, landing on the rock below in a manner more expeditious than dignified, while the arrow glanced over him and shot away in the air with deadly velocity.

Nat now saw that he was to be assailed at two points, and all his efforts must be turned against these. After watching their movements a while, he found the same artifice was to be adopted by both parties. Each was to force a huge, tabular rock far enough across the gorge to allow them to leap across. There was no timber of any size in the vicinity, but the cunning of the rascals was sufficient for everything. Ponderous boulders were in readiness to roll upon the end, and preserve the rocks in their places while the miscreants passed over.

In spite of our hero's most vigilant efforts, the savages succeeded in pushing these partial bridges far enough to answer their purposes, without affording him a chance to pick off one of their number. By means of bushes, and by keeping themselves

behind the boulders they were rolling, they placed it out of his power to harm a single one. The point was now reached which was to decide the contest. All that remained was for the Indians to cross.

The fatal shot of Nat had the effect of thoroughly alarming the rest, and there was not one who dared expose himself to his aim. They now endeavored, by every artifice in their power, to draw a shot from him, their intention being to rush across before he could have time to reload. The adventurer understood this, and made his resolution to reserve his fire until the last moment, not using it until he was compelled to.

Now and then a bronzed head would rise to view and then flit out of sight again; and one or two, bolder than the rest, sprung to their feet, brandishing their tomahawks over their heads, and leaping about so as to distract his aim. Once a dark ball, surmounted by a gaudy tuft, remained in plain sight several minutes, as if inviting a shot; but Nat was too shrewd to imagine that any real savage would expose his skull in such a manner. He preserved his silence with a provoking coolness.

At last an Indian sprung up and essayed to run out upon the lid of rock, but dropped quickly behind one of the boulders. This stratagem well-nigh brought the wished-for shot from our hero. His

finger was pressing the trigger when the savage whisked out of sight.

A moment after, the same thing took place above him, and was repeated at both places several times. The game, at this point, assumed an exciting character. Nat knew it was the easiest thing in the world for these redskins to leap across, and he believed they intended to do it whether he fired or not. The only trouble with them was that each knew it would be instant death to one of them; and these demonstrations were continued, each one hoping his friend would commit suicide for the benefit of his race.

He watched the visages of both, until he saw one assume an air of determination. This Indian had resolved to make the attempt. But he was not given the opportunity. While rising in the very act of starting, he gave a frenzied yell and leap in the air, pierced through the breast by the bullet of Nat Todd.

A loud howl rent the air, and the forms of five dusky redskins rose in view. The foremost, without hesitation, ran out on the edge of the rock and made a bound outward; but, while in mid-air, he gave a death-shriek, and, doubling up like a ball, went spinning down the chasm.

The others paused in astonishment at this second

" His finger was pressing the trigger when the savage whisked out of sight."

shot, while Nat hurriedly reloaded his rifle. Scarce a moment elapsed before he fired the second time among them, and his own shot was echoed by that of another from an unknown quarter, and two savages bit the ground at the same instant. This was too much for the Indians, who really believed the Evil Spirit was upon the opposite side of the gorge, and they scattered and fled as if he pursued them.

The consternation of these savages was no greater than the amazement of Nat Todd at such an unlooked-for assistance. Two fatal shots besides his own had been fired, and they had saved him.

"When I pulled the trigger the first time, I asked the Lord to preserve me. He has done it, and I thank him for it!" said he, reverently. "Still some human hand has been used to do it, and he must be around; so I'll hunt him up."

This was easier said than done. He spent a long time limping around the rocks, and searching for his unknown friend. But it was of no avail, and at last he shouted:

"Hello, whoever you are! Come out and show yourself. It's Nat Todd you've befriended, and he wants to see you!"

A suppressed laugh reached his ear. Wheeling around, he saw a large, powerful-looking man,

dressed in the garb of a trapper, leaning on a long rifle, and leisurely surveying him.

"Je-ru-sa-lem! if there ain't BILL BIDDON then my name isn't Nat Todd!"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH THE NARRATIVE MAKES BUT SLIGHT PROGRESS.

"How ar' yer, Nat?" queried Biddon, extending his huge hand toward our hero.

"Why, well, and nearly crazy with joy at seeing you here agin. What brought you out in this part of the world?"

"What brought yerself? I s'pose we've both got a little story to tell, and so let's jis git under cover somewhar and have a powerful talk. No fear of the reds now," added the trapper, with a chuckle, as he moved away.

It cost Nat considerable pain to keep pace with him, and he was compelled, at last, to cry out for him to walk more slowly.

"What's the matter?" queried the trapper, turning toward him. "They didn't git none of them arrers in yer, did they?"

"No; I took a pretty long jump and got bruised somewhat. I wasn't much afeared of their arrows."

"You wasn't, eh?" asked Bill Biddon, as he picked up the one which had been discharged at Nat. "Wasn't much afeared of 'em, eh? Do you see that reddish stuff on the p'int of this arrer-head? Wal, sir, ef that had pricked yer skin, you'd a swelled up like a grizzly, and at last busted. Coz why? It's the rankest of pizen. Shoot the imps! I know thar tricks."

The trapper led the way some distance further, when he halted before what seemed the face of a solid rock. He turned around, carefully scrutinizing every rock and bush visible; when, apparently satisfied, he passed a few feet further, then made a short turn and suddenly disappeared, leaving Nat in the most unbounded astonishment.

"Come in, come in!" said the gruff voice of Biddon, sounding from the cavernous recess of the rock. "Come in, come in, or one of them pizened arrers might hit you."

"Yes, yes," repeated Nat, with an involuntary start, for, strange as it may seem, the presence of the formidable trapper made him less courageous than when alone. "Yes, yes; but how is the thing to be done?"

The face of his companion now appeared at a small opening, and he noticed, for the first time, a peculiar longitudinal aperture, through which it seemed im-

possible to force a human body. When attempted, however, it proved an easy matter. He found himself standing within a small, narrow cavern, lighted by the openings at either end. Beaver and otter-skins were hung around, and the apartment looked very comfortable.

"Is this your lodging-place?" asked Nat.

"Yas, sir; this is the place where Oregon Sol has slept for a long time; but he's give up the business in these parts, and offered me his house to rent."

"Oregon Sol! Do you know him?"

"Wagh! Does we know each other? Me and him war born in the same house in Boonslick County, Missouri, on the same night, and growed up aside of each other for a dozen years, fightin' and quarrelin' as much as if we war brothers. We hadn't either of us any brothers or sisters, and Sol's parents (as they call 'em) went under as soon as he learnt to go on his pegs. Purty soon mine did the same, and we jined and went with a lot of trappers, and have been knocking 'round the 'arth ever since. Kit Carson was born in the same place, the year after us, but, in course, he was a little shaver when we left. But, shoot me, I'm talking too much. Know anything 'bout Jarsey and the gal he was after? Did they git off, or what's 'come of 'em?"

"I saw them get on a steamboat on the Yellow-

stone, and I suppose they are somewhere in the States, married, and enjoying themselves as much as possible. That puts me in mind of the message they both left for you. He and Imogene told me, if I ever came across you, to give their undying love to you, and to ask you to go down in their parts and live with 'em."

"Jarsey kinder walked into my affections, and I should like to shake the feller's paw agin; and that little Imogene, (bless her, if I don't half think she's a sperit yet,) I'd go a long tramp to see her give me one of her purty grins. But I never spect to see 'em agin. I can't bear the clearins', and I spect Jarsey has got me in some thar books or newspapers down thar. I'd kinder like to see how Bill Biddon would look in a book, and see some thar picters of 'im. Jarsey told me he was goin' to do it, and I s'pose the feller has. How comes it that you're here?"

"Well, Biddon, you remember there were *two* girls who escaped that massacre at which you were present some years ago."

"Yas."

"Well, you know Relmond has gone off with one of these."

"Yas, I know it."

"And the other has never been found."

"No, I b'lieve not."

"And that she may still be living."

"P'r'aps so."

"At any rate, there is as much reason to believe she is as there was to believe Imogene was before she was seen."

"Yas, shoot me if that ain't so."

"Well, Imogene told me, before going East, that she always believed that Irene, her sister, and a lovely maiden, was captured by Indians, who went toward Oregon with her."

"What of that?"

"Well, Oregon Sol, who was down at Brown's Hole when I left there, told me that a year or two ago he saw a captive white girl up in these mountains. Don't you think there is some reason to believe that that captive is Irene Merment?"

"Yes, sir!"

"That is the reason I am here. I am looking for her."

"You said the other gal b'lieved the other one was taken by reds as b'longed to these parts?"

"She often remarked that to me."

"Wal, sir, *she was right!*"

"She was right! How do you know that, Biddon?"

"Bill Biddon hain't tramped the prairies for thirty years for nothin'. Ef he can't tell whar a red be-

longs, even ef it is night when he sees him, then you may shoot me. When them reds came down on us that night, I knowed they war from three different tribes, and knowed one of these tribes b'longed to Oregon, and I've long s'picioned the gal was taken by the Oregon ones. But it allers seemed to me she war gone under long ago. She war more tender nor Jarsey's, and didn't seem built right to stand the weather. You say old Sol told you he'd see'd such a gal in these parts once?"

"Yes."

"Wal, he told me the same thing, and that's one reason why *I'm* here. Howsumever, afore going further, let's hear the news 'bout yourself, beginnin' with the time when you give us the slip on the Yellowstone."

Nat thereupon related what the reader has probably learned in another volume, and at its close asked:

"Now, Biddon, let me hear the particulars of your history."

"I hain't got much to tell. I s'pose Jarsey told you 'bout me up to the pint whar I went off with the brigade?"

"Yes, he related that."

"Wal, I went up to the Selkirk settlement with them fellers, and they give me a rousin' pile of money

and trinkets for the furs I got 'em, and then very perlitely told me my name was down on thar books, and I was appinted to go to one of thar forts called Illycross, * 'bout fifteen thousand miles further north, whar I was to trap for seventy-five or eighty years, and they'd give me another pile of money. Wagh! I told 'em, jist as perlitely, they might go to the devil, and slingin' my gun over my shoulder, I stepped down to Oregon and called on Sol, who told me 'bout that gal, and I've stayed hyer lookin' round for her ever since."

"Have you learned anything of her?" eagerly asked Nat.

"Yes, summat. Them Injins as come so near wipin' you out, I'm purty sure have got her, and I shouldn't wonder ef that's the reason why they're so afeared any of the boys should come round hyer. They smoked Sol out, and he advised me not to stay here; but I's bound to find out all 'bout that gal. Do you know how many of the reds war chasin' you?"

"About a dozen, I believe," replied Nat.

"There war jist eight, and one rifle would scatter every one."

Nat winced under this rebuke of the trapper, but with a cunning shrewdness replied:

* **Fort Isle a la Crosse, a post in the Northern Department.**

"You see, the way of it was this:" (here the speaker placed the forefinger of his right hand very impressively in the palm of his left;) "I hate Indians, especially them that hate me, which I believe include all west of the Mississippi, and when these eight rascals started after me, I made up my mind to shoot every one. Accordingly I run, so as to make them follow me, *of course.* I just stepped over that gorge, hoping they'd all try to follow me and break their necks. But they wouldn't do it, and so I commenced picking them off, *intending not to spare a single one!* You see I *entrapped* them. You came along and helped me, for which I'm much obliged."

A broad smile illumined the trapper's visage, as our hero ended his remarks.

"Shoot me, Nat, you're a qua'r beaver. I used to think you's *afeared* of redskins, and I kinder think so yit. But when a feller would expect you to own up squa'r and knock under, you're sure to give some reason that nobody ever thought on. Howsumever, I've taken a like for yer, Nat, and I offers you a grip of my paw. When Bill Biddon does that *he means it,* and he's your friend as long as his top-knot is on his noddle."

The two grasped hands, and sealed forever the friendship they had long entertained for each other.

"Bill," said Nat, "down at Fort Hall this letter was given me. Since seeing you, I've thought perhaps you wrote it."

"Let me see it."

The trapper took the letter and fumbled it awkwardly, and examined the writing with a curiosity similar to that with which a scholar would scrutinize some unknown hieroglyphic.

"Ar them what you call *letters?*" he asked, putting his finger on them.

"Certainly; can't you write, Biddon?"

"Me *write!* Wagh! Them crooked things looks like mashed bugs to me, and allers did. Me and Oregon Sol went to school one day down in Missouri, but the teacher wasn't there, and we hadn't no books, so you see our edication was limited, as they say down in the settlements. I can't see how them jiggers can speak, but I s'pose they does. Jist read 'em."

Nat did so, when the contents instantly absorbed the attention of Biddon. A long consultation was held between the two, in which the latter stated that he had been in his present retreat but a few weeks; but from "signs," he was well satisfied that the Indians had a prisoner among them, of whom they were extremely jealous. They decided to remain in their present quarters as long as they could hold

them, or until definite knowledge of the lost-one was obtained. The authorship of the letter was as great a mystery as ever. Biddon said, from what Oregon Sol had told him, he believed there were persons at the different forts who knew of the strange captive, and who had conveyed their intelligence to Nat either to mislead or to guide him—most probably the latter. Who that person could be, or how he learnt the name of our hero, neither could divine.

"But Sol stated that it was near the cañon of some river," remarked Nat.

"Jist keep still a minute."

As the two listened, a dull roaring, like the distant roll of the sea, was heard.

"What does that mean?" queried Nat.

"That's your kenyon." *

"We are then in the vicinity to which Oregon Sol directed me. It is now rather late in the afternoon. Shall we show ourselves agin to-day?"

"I will crawl out pretty soon and take observa-

* A cañon is a narrow, tunnel-like passage, through which a river forces its way. Compressed within these walls, so close in some places as to be easily leaped over, the water rushes with inconceivable velocity. When viewed from the top, the river often presents the appearance of one mass of foam and whirlpools, from which the mist ascends as if from a vast waterfall.

tions. That jump of yours—which I allow was some—'pears to have lamed you a little, and I s'pose you'll want to rest your bones."

"Yes, I shouldn't mind it. If you're going out, keep a sharp eye for the infernal rascals."

"Wagh! don't be afeared of Bill Biddon. I was out lookin' at the weather when I heard your rifle crack, and I knowed thar war whites 'bout, and like enough in difficulty with the reds, so I crawled around and soon see'd how things stood. In course I didn't know 'twas you, but I made up my mind to give 'em a taste of Bill Biddon, thinkin' as how they might be pryin' round after my traps, if I didn't scare 'em a little."

"Do you think you've given them such a fright that they will not disturb you again?"

"Wagh! wagh! I give 'em a powerful scare, wal, I did; but I'm afeared it won't last long. They thought awhile ago they'd come across the Old Boy himself, but after they've talked over the matter, in course they'll know who it war, and I shouldn't wonder ef they burn us or root us out."

"What was it they did to frighten Oregon Sol away?"

"He wasn't exactly frightened away. Ef he had wanted to stay, he'd done it, sure, in spite of 'em. Wal, thar! they piled a whole lot of brush in front

of him, and *smoked him out.* He stood it as long as he could, when he blazed among 'em, and settin' up a yell, tore right through the whole pack, smashin' a dozen heads, jist to leave his mark among 'em. The rest took after, yellin' and screechin' like mad, and for a time thar war some fun. But Sol knows how to use his pegs, and it didn't bother him at all to give 'em the slip. He had trapped so long hyer that beavers were gettin' scarce, and some redskin, that he'd took a like to, told him of a great place, where I s'pose he's gone by this time."

"But he saw this lovely maiden but once, and it was in another place."

"Yas, jist so; it was in another place he see'd her, but not fur off, and it war the same imps that are round hyer. They travel round like turkles with thar packs on thar backs. I met Sol down toward Fort Hall, and after hearin' of his story, I made up my mind to come hyer."

"But Jerusalem! ain't you running an awful risk."

"Yer *afeared?*"

"No—oh, no! but then I's thinkin'—you know—that—that *you* run the risk."

"Don't you see the reds see'd Sol leave, and as he war the only feller as has been in these parts for a long time, 'twan't noways likely they'd spect another

chap right off to step into his tracks, and 'tain't likely they'd ever found it out ef I'd kept shady and let 'em wipe you out."

Shortly after this, Biddon went out.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THERE IS A HOUSEWARMING, A VISION AND A FLIGHT.

It was dark when Biddon returned, and, after several minutes' unimportant conversation, the two lay down to rest. In the morning Nat found himself unable to walk, owing to the bruises mentioned; but they were not of dangerous character, and in a few days he was restored to his usual condition. The trapper continued to engage in his vocation, more for the purpose of supplying the two with food, and for passing away time, than for anything else.

In the meantime the approach of winter was rapid. The weather, in the course of a week, set in with most intense coldness, and the streams freezing over seriously impeded the success of the trapper. He had, however, laid aside enough to supply all necessary food through the winter; and, all things considered, their situation was by no means unenviable.

One thing was a matter of surprise to both. Not a sign of an Indian was seen, and Biddon more than once stated that he believed the tribe had gone into winter-quarters in some other section. Nat proposed that they should follow them, but the trapper remarked that it might be only a stratagem to deceive them. The Indian village was several miles away, in a sort of valley or depression in the mountains. A winter, such as in our more temperate sections is rarely witnessed, was approaching, and the advice of Biddon that they should "keep out of sight and make themselves comfortable," was perhaps the wisest that could be followed under the circumstances.

The winter, as may well be supposed, was most tedious to the two adventurers. Sometimes the snow was whirled in blinding eddies through the gorges, and, for a month, lay several feet in depth, and the walls of their cavern-home, were as if made of solid ice; but their abundance of furs, and the fuel with which the ingenuity of the trapper supplied them, was sufficient for all purposes. Sometimes the burly form of the latter might be seen on the margin of the frozen streams, cautiously searching for beaver-signs, or setting his traps for the foxes that lurked around them. On several occasions, Nat and Biddon ventured out upon these excursions dur-

ing moonlight nights, when the crusted snow sustained their weight without leaving a trail. Their footsteps echoed with a noise that, in the intense stillness, could be heard at a great distance; while, now and then, the long, dismal howl of the droves of famished wolves pierced the night-air with a chilling power. During the long nights, Biddon often whiled away the hours in relating reminiscences of his wonderful career, while, in turn, Nat gave many of his own adventures in Lubec, including his love-affair, already familiar to the reader. Not an Indian trail, through all the long, dreary winter, was discovered by the trapper, and they remained unmolested by man or animal. Nat was often startled when he reflected upon his temerity in thus venturing into the mountains alone. He had not the remotest suspicion of ever encountering Biddon again, and had he been left without a companion, he would either have had to perish by starvation or cold, or thrown himself upon the hospitality of the savages, where it is not to be expected he would have fared any better.

But, at last, the winter wore away, and beautiful, radiant spring dawned upon them. The mountains echoed with the sound of a thousand rills and streams, the rivers burst their icy barriers with a shock like the noise of thunder, and vegetation

sprung forth as if by magic. So sudden was the change that, as Nat stepped forth from the cave, one clear morning, it seemed as if he were in a land of enchantment.

The time had now come for action. The warm, genial climate, unsurpassed by any in the world, the exuberant foliage, all were favorable. Biddon returned, one evening, to the cave, from a sort of scouting expedition with which he had occupied himself during the day.

"What have you learned?" asked Nat, as he noticed a peculiar expression upon the trapper's face.

"Wal, I have learnt a little, but s'picioned a heap."

"What is it? Let me know."

"I's out around takin' observations, as them fellers from the settlements say, this afternoon, when I come onto the Injin village. It's down in a valley, and it's my opine they've jist arrove, 'cause why: I've been along there in the winter and didn't see a single lodge. They've wintered further up the mountains and have jist came back."

"Do you suppose they know we are here?"

"I guess they ain't sure, but they s'picion it."

"Why do you think so?"

"I have come across a dozen trails, and b'lieve

they're huntin' fur signs of us. Ef they happen to find one of my traps, it'll be all they want. They'll be down on us in a twinklin'."

"Do they know our hiding-place?"

"This is the same place used by Oregon Sol, you must mind, and it ain't noways likely they'll miss takin' the first peep in hyer to see how things look."

"Jerusalem! we'll be in a hot place before we know. Suppose they do surround us, what will we do?"

"Stay in till we git smoked out, and then make a run for it."

"But can we get away from them?"

"Wagh! that's 'cording to how fast your pegs move, 'though I think the chances are good of gittin' your ha'r raised."

"My gracious, Biddon!" exclaimed Nat in consternation, "we must arrange things differently from this."

"*Afeared?*" asked Biddon, with a piercing look.

"Of course not—certainly not. My great objection, Biddon, you see, is this: if they undertake to smoke us out, it'll be sure to hurt our complexions very much—especially mine as I ain't used to it; and when we find that lovely maiden, why, you see,

I won't be able to make as good an impression as I should like to. Don't you see, Biddon?"

The trapper indulged in a hearty laugh before replying:

"You're a trump, you is. Howsumever, it's well 'nough to be on the look-out. I don't s'pose you care about goin' under jist now, ef the wipin' out has to be done by the reds. As fur me, it don't make no difference when the last sickness comes, 'though I should die hard ef I thought my top-knot was ever to hang in the lodge of a redskin. There ain't no one to cry when Bill Biddon goes. He has hunted a long time 'mong the praeries, and is gettin' so well 'long that the day can't be fur off after all, and he ain't noways skeerish about it. Howsumever, as I's sayin' 'tain't noways likely you've a handkerin' to go under jist now, and so we'll take a look 'round us."

"Have you no means at hand to escape should an attack be made?"

"You hear the roar of that kenyon? Wal, in under the rocks there I've a canoe, and when the time comes—ef it ever does—when we can choose the way in which we'll step out, that'll answer."

"How, Biddon? I don't understand you."

"*We can go down the kenyon!*"

"O thunder! that would be sure death."

"You've hit the truth there once, ef you never did afore, though 'tain't exactly the truth either. You'd stand a chance of comin' out right—'bout the the same chance that a painted Crow would afore Bill Biddon's shooter, after he'd drawed bead on him!"

"Narrow enough chance, in heaven's name! But, Biddon, what do you propose to do?"

"We won't undertake nothin' to-night, but to-morrow we'll spend the day in scoutin'. We'll find out ef that gal's hyreabouts. Ef she is, we'll make a dash fur her; ef she isn't—why she isn't."

A long consultation was held that evening between the two friends, and their course of action determined upon. It was decided that the first point was to ascertain whether the one for whom they were searching was in the tribe. Despite the circumstances pointing that way, there still was good reason to doubt this all-important fact. Were she present, however, they could hope for no success unless they should discover some means by which first to communicate with her, assure her of the existence of her sister and the efforts being made to restore her to civilization, and thus awaken a natural desire to escape upon her own part. Could they succeed in this, there was every reason to hope

for entire success, although, as the trapper intimated, the suspicion and vigilance of the Indians would be so great as to make it a work of the greatest peril to all concerned.

In the morning the two ventured forth, taking opposite directions. The vegetation was so abundant toward the base of the mountains that every facility was afforded for concealment, and they had little fear of detection. Biddon proceeded in a westerly direction, intending to pass around and reconnoiter the village from the opposite side, while Nat concluded to lie off in the woods and view matters from a distance. The latter made his way cautiously down the mountain, and entered the woods without encountering any suspicious object. Here the glorious foliage and the pleasant air were so tempting that he wandered through the forest almost forgetting the object that brought him thither. He crossed small streams of water which came down in cascades from the mountain, and flowed over their pebbly beds like liquid mountain-air, in which the fish, darting hither and thither, resembled flashes of gold and silver. The forest-arches echoed with the songs of thousands of birds; the sky overhead, as blue as Italy's, was flecked by a few drifting clouds; the air had that peculiar clearness which renders it doubly exhilarating. Nat

wandered onward, like a boy lost in enchantment, until noon, when he suddenly noticed that he had passed the Indian village by several miles. Somewhat startled by this discovery, and withal a little ashamed, he immediately turned to retrace his way. Having now no fascination to make the mind insensible to what the body was doing, the distance seemed astonishingly great. But after a few hours of hurried walk, he caught sight of the Indian lodges, nestling down in the valley like a lot of hives, while the bees were swarming around the outside and through the adjoining forest. Nat now and then caught a sight of the warriors, glittering in their gaudy dress like so many tropical birds, and flitting hither and thither in a manner that warned him to be cautious of his movements as he approached the vicinity of the village. While proceeding thus, he stumbled upon a scene that made him recoil in astonishment. Several trees, standing close together, were interlaced and interwoven by vines in such a manner as to make a natural arbor. Pressing between these vines, he found the semblance from within more perfect than from the outside. It seemed as though art must have assisted at some time in forming such a beautiful retreat—more especially as the interior had the appearance of being fitted up for the abode of some one during the

sultry noontide hours. But Nat had seen such wonderful doings of Nature in the wilds of the Northwest, that it would have required a most extraordinary demonstration upon her part to have shaken his belief in her potency. The present scene was so inviting, and the air so cool, that he concluded to rest himself for a while before continuing his reconnoiterings—or, more properly, commencing them. Had he taken the precaution to examine more closely the network of vines around him, he would have discovered such evidences of the hand of man as to have made him careful about hesitating long enough even to view the arbor, much less to trust his body within it for an hour or two. But no such suspicion entered his mind; and, seating himself upon a curious-looking object, he gave himself up to the enjoyment of the scene around.

As might be expected, he fell asleep! A half-hour after entering, he rolled off his seat upon the leaves without waking, and continued his slumbers, actually *snoring* loud enough to attract attention from the outside! An hour passed thus, when he awoke, and gazed with a bewildered look around him. He recalled in a moment the circumstances by which he was surrounded, and was about to rise to his feet and pass out, when he was startled by a

vision so unexpected, so astounding, that we must digress a moment to describe it in full.

At the opening by which he had entered, stood a person whom it would have required no great effort of the imagination to fancy a being just dropped from the skies. Her dress was purely Indian in character, with all the dazzling contrasts of color and costly abundance that characterizes the costume of a princess. The hair was black and flowing, and was surmounted by a wreath, in which clustered such a number of eagle-feathers of the most brilliant dyes, as to give it the appearance of the plumage of one of those wondrous birds of the Orient. A shawl of the hue of blood, spangled by all the curious devices that an Indian's ingenuity could suggest, fell from the shoulders to the feet, and was open enough in front to reveal a dress of green and blue, figured and wrought after the manner which a savage sorcerer sometimes evinces. The leggins were of the most tasteful kind, and the moccasins small and ornamented by beads and trinkets. As she stood, the left hand was closed over the right shoulder so as to grasp the folds of the shawl and sustain it in its place, while the right arm was raised, and the fingers were extended as if in horror. The eyes were intensely black and glowing, the mouth partly opened, and one foot slightly in

advance of the other. The apparition of a white man seemed to have transfixed her with a species of a terror, and she remained as motionless as a statue. When this being first burst upon Nat's vision, he started, recoiled, and then gazed at it as if fascinated. He examined the gorgeous dress, the form and the features. He noticed the dark eyes and hair, the small, slightly Roman nose, the finely-cut lips, and glowing throat; suddenly his own features lightened up, and he sprung forward:

"How are you, Irene? Glad to see you. Imogene and Bill Relmond are first-rate, I believe—that is, they were the last I heard of them. This is your summer retreat, I suppose; come in and sit down, and let's have a talk together."

It would be difficult to picture the astonishment of the being addressed by these words. It was not till she heard her own name uttered that she moved. She started and gasped:

"Who are you?"

"Nathan Todd, from the State of Maine."

"Where—why are you here?"

"Why am I here? I have come all this distance to look for *you*."

Irene—for such it was—stepped forward and peered into our hero's face until he felt himself blushing to his very toes.

"Oh! explain yourself; what does all this mean?"

"Well, the way of it is this," commenced Nat, making a movement with his arms, as though he were putting on a coat, and laying the finger of one hand in the palm of another. "You see, your name is Irene Merment, in the first place, Isn't it?"

"It is—and how came you to know it?"

"We'll come to that by-and-by. Well, Bill Biddon and myself (more especially myself) are here after you."

While Nat was speaking, the fair being gazed at him as if she doubted his sanity. Several times he noticed, too, that she glanced furtively around her, as though she feared the approach of some one.

"But," said she, "what do you wish of me?"

It liked to have slipped from Nat's mouth before he thought; but it occurred to him it was rather early in their acquaintance to make the all-important answer.

"We want to take you from these outlandish rascals to the land of civilization, where you may see your friends."

"Me—I have no friends but these Indians."

"Beg your pardon, the best friend you've got in

"Irene."

the world stands before you; and haven't you got a sister?"

"I had once. If she is living, she is, like me, a hopeless captive. I never expect to see her until I meet her in heaven."

"You're all wrong again. I've seen your sister Imogene; she is married to a fellow named Relmond, from down toward New Jersey somewhere. He is rather soft-like, but they're happy for all that. Happy, most, as I expect to be when—"

He finished the sentence by a burning blush and cough. Irene turned as pale as death, but mastered her terrible emotion, and asked:

"Is this true? Do tell me all. But I fear for you. If the Indians see you, you will be killed."

"There are various opinions about that," replied our hero, confidently. "However, the story must be given. A number of years ago, all of your family, except yourself and sister, were murdered on the plains by the all-fired savages. Each of you were taken captives, and carried off by different tribes. Your sister, Imogene, was rescued from captivity by myself, assisted by Biddon, who was your guide at the time of the massacre, and who is here now—assisted by him, I say, and Relmond, who is gone East with her and married her. I heard her speak of you, and I made a solemn vow to find out your

fate. The Lord directed me here, and I've found you at last. Me and Biddon have been hunting all over the mountains for you, and I've nearly worried to death about you. You'll go home with us and see your sister, won't you, Irene?"

"Yes, yes; I could not live here now that I know my only earthly relative is living. I would die—I would die."

She covered her face and gave way to her emotion for a time, while Nat busied himself with surveying her wonderful dress, admiring her faultless form, and conjuring up a hundred wild schemes of escaping with her. Soon she looked up.

"Are you and Biddon the two white men who have remained in the mountains this winter?"

"My gracious! how did you know we were here?"

"The Indians have suspected it, although they did not know where it was you remained. Oh, my friend! you are in awful danger."

"Where? what is it?"

"The savages have watched the mountains for you a long time, and they have found, at last, where it is you stay, and they are going to kill you. They will do it if you are not careful. Oh! I saw them kill a white man once whom they found here, and they tried to get another one. They set a fire

all around the cave in which he had hid himself, and tried to make him come out that way. He set up a yell and ran right through the fire and got away from theme after all. Oh! I was so glad, I spent the whole night in thanking the blessed God for it. He was the same man that I once warned of danger several years before. Do not go back to your cave to-night, for they will kill you."

"Gracious! I must find Biddon."

"Do not sleep there then."

"There's no danger of my sleeping anywhere to-night! I'll go right off and see him now—but hold on," he exclaimed, wheeling around and facing Irene, "how about you're going with us?"

"I must see you again," she replied in a low tone, and with such an accent as to show that it had been years since she had used her native tongue.

"I have it!" cried Nat, exultingly. "I will see Biddon, and we'll camp out in the woods somewhere to-night, and I'll come around to this place to-morrow night, and we'll start for home right off."

"Have you horses?"

"Not one. I lost mine last fall, and some of your Indians must have stolen Biddon's."

"I will try and get some and bring them here, and oh! may Heaven help me!"

She trembled like an aspen as she spoke, and soon added:

"Go now to your friend, and I entreat you to be careful. Oh! this cannot be reality!—it is!—it—is! God grant that I may see my long-lost sister!"

The next minute she was gone, and Nat, gazing a moment in vain to catch a glimpse of her, turned also and departed. Hardly five minutes had elapsed when the bushes parted within a dozen feet of where she had been standing, and the crouching form of an Indian rose to view. His face was distorted with passion, for he had witnessed the interview just recorded; and, although not a word was undersood, the wily savage read their meaning in their faces and gestures. He bent his head as if listening, and then disappeared as stealthily as he had come.

In the meantime Nat made his way toward the cavern, his heart throbbing tumultuously with his newly-awakened hope, and with the numerous schemes he conjured up to escape the fury of the savages. It was already growing dusk, and, while yet some distance from their rendezvous, he heard

a rustling in the bushes, and before he could divine its cause, Biddon stood beside him.

"Don't go any nearer the rocks!" he admonished in a whisper.

"Why, what's the trouble?"

"They've found us out at last, and it's my private opine there'll be some fun to-night. Jist step back hyer a little further in the woods and we'll talk the thing over. Now," asked the trapper, "what have you seen?"

Nat related every particular of his interview with the captive, Irene.

"Just what I expected," added Biddon. "You orter knowed more than to go asleep in that place——"

"But you see I wanted to find out how the thing worked, and if I hadn't I wouldn't have seen the lovely maiden——"

"I know," interrupted Biddon, with a slight chuckle; "it's happened to come out right, but you orter knowed better. I've been peakin' round their village, and soon found out by the way things looked that they's up to some deviltry, and long afore night I knowed it war our place they'd sot eyes on. As I said afore, they'll be thar to-night."

"And what'll we do?"

"We'll lay off. Foller me as still as a snake."

The trapper led the way further up the mountain until he reached a point several hundred yards from the cañon of which we have before spoken, and about a furlong from the cavern which, up to this time, had been their quarters. Here they halted before a cluster of buffalo-berry bushes. Both knelt down on their hands and knees, crept a dozen feet into the densest portion, where they nestled down like a couple of rabbits.

"What is this for?" asked Nat, in a whisper.

"You see, there's going to be somewhat of a moon to fight, and when they don't find us among the rocks, they'll make a search around it fur us, fur they're bound to either lift our ha'r or skear us out of these parts."

"But won't they find us here?"

"They won't look so fur as this to-night, and if we can lay out of sight till to-morrow night, they'll think we've left for good, and we'll have the next night to do the business for him."

Nat saw the meaning of the course taken by the trapper. The latter hoped to escape the eyes of the savages by the very boldness of his stratagem. He had found, during the day, that his traps had been visited, and had every good reason to believe their retreat in the rocks was suspected. He knew that a

search would be made through the adjoining forest and mountains; and where the savages were acquainted with every nook which could conceal a human body, there was little cause to hope they would escape their vision. They might have made a retreat of several miles in the mountains, and thus avoided them until they could venture in the vicinity of the village again; but the reckless trapper chose a bolder and more perilous artifice. The thicket in which he and Nat had concealed themselves afforded them a perfect screen, and there was no danger of their being seen by any passer-by, unless he should enter and separate the bushes. He had chosen a point so near the cañon to avail them in their last extremity should a discovery take place.

They sat an hour or so conversing in whispers, when Nat felt the hand of Biddon placed suddenly upon his shoulder, and heard his whispered exclamation:

"Look!"

A bright, lurid glare filled that quarter of the heavens over the cavern which had so long been their home, and a pile of blazing brush, sending its cinders high in the air, was raging around the rock itself.

"The imps ar' at work, but they've missed thar scalps this time."

The Indians had waited until late at night before commencing their work. At that time they judged their victims would be asleep within the cave, totally unsuspicious of danger. Their preparations were made with the utmost secrecy, so as not to alarm them. Huge piles of brush were heaped around the cave until it was literally covered with it. The most daring of their number could not be induced to enter the cave in the face of the two rifles and knives they supposed to be within it.

The torch was applied to the brush in a dozen different places at the same moment; and, as the forked flames shot upward, half a hundred throats rent the air with exultant yells. From their hiding-place the two whites could see the shadowy forms leaping and flinging their limbs, like demons in some hellish revel. The savages expected their victims would either remain within the cave until suffocated to death, or until they were compelled to rush out in their frenzy, when it was intended to tomahawk them.

"B'ars and beavers! wouldn't it do me good jist to make one or two of them imps bounce a little higher?" remarked Biddon, pointing his rifle

through the bushes and letting the gleam of the fire fall upon the barrel.

"I wouldn't try it, Biddon," pleaded Nat. "I wouldn't try it at all; it might be dangerous—dangerous to the Indians, I mean."

"That's jist what Biddon was thinking."

"Yes—I was going to say so—but I wouldn't do it, Biddon. Let them think we're in there all the time."

"Oh! I ain't such a fool as to fire as the case stands now."

The savages continued dancing and yelling until morning. The fire was continually replenished and kept raging; and, when daylight dawned upon them, they were satisfied their victims were already dead. The pile of glowing coals was now raked away from the entrance, and three Indians bounded within with drawn knives. Instantly after, a howl of baffled fury was heard as they saw the whites had escaped. The apartment was filled with smoke and the intolerable stench of the burning peltries, and it was this which had been mistaken for that of the human bodies. The savages, overcome by the sickening smell, darted out again and reported the whites gone. Another search was hurriedly made by others, which, of course, confirmed this fact.

A consultation was now held, and it was agreed that they had been deceived. The two men could not have eluded them after the cave was surrounded. They must have discovered the intentions upon them and fled. The Indian who had witnessed the interview between Nat and Irene had imparted it to others, who were thus convinced that they were still lurking in the vicinity. Just what Biddon predicted took place. The savages determined to spend the day in searching the mountains and forest, and to discover and sacrifice them.

Biddon, in his concealment, read this resolve in the actions of his enemies, and assured Nat that the critical time was coming. If they could remain secure until dusk, he was satisfied of success. They would then steal out and meet Irene at the place appointed; but if discovered—

"We'll make a dash for the kenyon. My canoe is there, and we'll be out of their sight in a twinklin'. We couldn't make a run for it through these mountains without losin' our ha'r."

So that was determined. Now and then Biddon parted the bushes with his rifle, so as to afford him a view of what was going on. At such times he could see some of the Indians hunting around the rock, and he rightly judged there were others

scattered through the wood. With characteristic thoughtfulness, the trapper had brought some beaver-meat with him, which the peril of their situation did not prevent from being enjoyed.

The forenoon wore away without any alarming circumstances occurring. On three several occasions Biddon had detected the presence of their enemies by applying his ear to the ground and hearing their footsteps; but all passed away, and they had good reason to believe the crisis had gone by.

"I don't believe the fools have the slightest thought of our being here," remarked Nat, exultingly.

Biddon instantly started, bent his head to the ground, and whispered:

"It's all up! we must make a run!"

"Why? they haven't seen us."

"I heard a redskin's step the minute you spoke, and I knew he heard you speak. He's gone to get the others."

"Jerusa—"

"Foller me, and use your pegs!"

He crawled hastily to the edge of the thicket and paused an instant.

"Yonder's the infarnal imp, and he's gettin' 'em fast. Come, Nat Todd, ef you go under, you'll have

the pleasure of knowin' 'twan't nobody's fault but your own. Keep close, don't make no noise, and do as I do."

As he spoke he started on a rapid run, his head bent down almost to his knees. Nat followed in the same crouching manner. They had gained a a dozen yards when a yell, something similar to the dreaded "death-halloo," rose on the air, and a score of Indians sprung toward them. The trapper instantly rose to an upright position and darted forward with the speed of the wind. Fortunately, there were none of their enemies in their way, and they reached the water several hundred yards in advance of all pursuers. The trapper bounded over the rocks into the boiling eddy in front of the cañon, and disappeared from view. While Nat stood a trembling, agonized spectator, he came out from beneath a ledge of rocks, holding the prow of a canoe.

"Over with you!" he shouted, making his voice heard above the thundering din of the waters.

Nat did not hesitate, but leaped out, going far down into the caldron. As he came, he was seized by Biddon—who had already entered the boat—and hauled in.

"Hold fast or you'll be throwed out!" screamed the trapper.

The next instant the boat was seized by the resistless current, as if it were an eggshell, and whirled in between the rocks. As it darted forward with the swiftness of a bullet, Nat heard a voice as though uttered miles away:

"The imps'll lose our ha'r after all thar trouble, for they'll never see us come out this kenyon."

Turning, he saw the trapper's face glowing like a spirit's. All around was a hell of foam—of dripping rocks—of deafening thunder—of dizzying spinning—of oblivion!

When the Indians reached the cañon, not a vestige of the whites was seen!

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT IT IS NOT ALWAYS A BAD THING TO "SPLIT UPON A ROCK."

THE cañon was over a mile in extent. It wound toward every point in the compass through a mass composed of red sandstone and siliceous limestone. Overhead the walls almost touched in places, while in others the fleetest horse could not have leaped them. The action of the water, for untold centuries, had hollowed out such a vast amount of the solid material as to give it the appearance of a tunnel partly burst open at the top. The blinding spray that continually ascended from the turmoil of water afforded only an occasional glimpse of what was beneath. In some places the current could be seen moving with a frightful calmness, here and there a spot of deep emerald-green visible, while in others the froth danced gayly forward, the particles seeming to repel each other with a peculiar shuddering motion.

Upon the disappearance of the twain in this raging cañon, the Indians rushed forward and peered downward at different points, hoping to obtain a glimpse of their bodies tossed from rock to rock. The stern of the canoe, only, was discovered as it shot from sight. Once, a dark body was seen to whirl with an awful velocity, and then it was hid from view by the mist and projecting crags.

At the point where the cañon issued from the mountains, and spread out into a broad, limpid stream, were stationed a score of warriors, waiting to see the fragments of the canoe or the mangled bodies of the whites. A couple of hours after, a loud shout was raised as the canoe appeared bottom upward. A daring savage sprung in, and, swimming until in calmer water, pulled the boat in. A minute examination followed, revealing the fact that it was split from stem to stern, and thrust through again and again by the jagged points of the rocks against which it had been cast. But no sign of the rash adventurers was seen. The savages waited until dusk, when, satisfied that their bodies were wedged in the walls or spinning in the vortex of some whirlpool, they withdrew, if not contented that their scalps were irrecoverably gone, still, re-

lieved to know that a dangerous enemy was effectually extinguished.

Night slowly settled over the mountain and wood. The faint moon, obscured up the drifting clouds, threw a ghostly and uncertain light over the scene. The Indian village was quiet and motionless. Now and then a dusky form flitted into view, and was lost again in the deep shadows. The continuous, thundering roar of the cañon was the only sound that broke the solemn stillness that otherwise held reign.

Several yards from the commencement of the cañon, a sharp crag projected nearly across the top. It was on this that the most venturesome of the Indian children often seated themselves, to the consternation of the more timid ones, as it was directly over the fiercest part, and was ever dripping with the water dashed against it. Had a savage made it his duty to watch this point of rock through the night, he would have noted something unusual and alarming.

Near midnight, a dark, circular line, like the coil of a hoop-snake, shot upward beside this point and dropped beneath. This was repeated four times, when, for the space of ten minutes, no further movement could have been noticed. At the end of that time a slight agitation took place, and an instant

after, a human head rose to view and as quickly disappeared again. Scarce a minute elapsed ere it rose once more, and was followed by a pair of massive shoulders. Remaining a foot above the surface, the bushy head moved around as if on a pivot, and had it not been for the deafening roar, the following words could have been heard:

"Thar don't appear to be none of the imps around jist now, and ef they don't think we've gone under this time, then Bill Biddon never raised the ha'r of a red this side of the Missipp. Wagh!"

The ponderous form of the trapper now heaved up from the chasm, and was instantly extended flat upon the rocks. A minute after, a conical point rose to view, ascending higher and higher, until the peaked hat, the dilated eyes, and glowing face of Nat Todd were visible in the pale moonlight.

"Sure they're all gone, Biddon?"

"Yas—be quick and flop out."

It required no second admonition for our hero to "flop out." Hardly were the words uttered before his angular legs beat the air and he slid dextrously backward beside Biddon.

"Now jump to t'other side and make for cover!" added the latter, springing over and shooting across toward the wood.

Nat skurried after him, experiencing that peculiar sensation that afflicts one who is momentarily expecting the prick of several poisoned arrows in the rear. The shadows of the wood reached, they halted for consultation.

"I tell you what, Biddon, I come nearer to death that time than I ever did before!"

"Shoot me ef it wan't as close a rub I b'lieve as I ever had. Things looked dub'ous when we went into that kenyon."

"How in the name of Heaven did you think to bring that rope with you?"

"Wagh! I told yer it wan't *sure* death to go in there, 'thought 'twas next to it. I brought that lasso with me and laid it in the boat a month ago."

"Ugh! it makes me shudder to think of that awful ride, and our stay on that rock, and the time when I was climbing up, when I dangled right in the midst of the dashing spray. S'posen that thong had broke! Where would I have been?"

"Never mind, you're right side up for the present. I've spent many an hour along the upper part of that kenyon, seein' how 'twas built, and what chance a feller would have who was sucked

in it. I knowed ef he ever got twenty yards in it he'd get his last sickness, *sure*. Yes, sir. I've throwed in big chunks of wood, and then watched thar capers."

"Playing, as I suppose."

"It was that playin' that saved you this time. I noticed that on an averige, three times out of seven, each chunk of wood was carried right over a big flat rock, where, ef it only had turned to stone, it would have sunk and stayed, being as the water was rather mild jist there. Not bein' a stone, howsumever, it was washed away. In course, I 'cluded a feller what was drawed in there would stand three chances out of seven of bein' carried on that same rock, whar, ef he was lively like, he might grab and hold on, and git breath afore goin' any furder. Now, Nat, the foolishest notion I ever had in my life was to take a shoot down that same kenyon, and I made up my mind to come back here some day and try it. That extra expense was saved, as we've jist seen. Our boat was carried on that very rock, where it split in two and spilled us out. I growed heavy all at once, and stuck to the rock like a dog to a root, and held you on. When we got the use of our pegs it wan't no hard job to keep our places,

'though we had to stand in a foot's water and hold fast with our hands, toes, and teeth. It was a lucky accident that cracked the boat jist in that place. It was the best rock to split on. A lucky accident, I say."

"It wasn't an *accident,* Biddon, it was the providence of God—one of those that He is forever strewing before us."

"S'pose so—but how 'bout Irene?"

"Jerusalem! I forgot all about that lovely maiden!"

"You'd better manage to let her know you're yet kickin', for 'tain't likely she has any more s'picion we're blabbin' above ground than the reds have. Wagh! that war a ride, down that kenyon, sure!"

The conversation recorded will give the reader an insight into the reason, or more properly the *cause,* that led the trapper to adopt his original method of eluding the savages. It was not, by any means, that it was the only one at his command; for the most veritable tyro could have retreated a mile or two in the forest and concealed himself until the search of the Indians was completed. But it was a peculiarity—an infatuation—of the eccentric Biddon to attempt the feat of entering the

cañon in the very face of death. His long familiarity with peril may have induced this extraordinary desire in a mind otherwise so well balanced and cautious—there being a species of insane ecstasy in defying the King of Terrors to his very face.

Besides, Biddon did not lose sight of the great advantage gained in case they escaped the fate their very course invited. The Indians had now no fears of them, and the way was consequently left open for the attempts they wished to make. There was one soft spot in the old mountaineer's heart. He loved the two orphans with a yearning, fatherly affection, and he had more than once intimated to Nat that, could he be satisfied both were restored to civilization and happiness, his desire for life would be ended. He had no further object to live for—he was well advanced in years, and the last journey could be as well taken at once.

From his remarks at different times, Nat was led to suspect he had a presentiment of his dissolution. The religious fear that characterized Nat's own actions—his repeated conversations of heaven, of hell, and the reunion of friends beyond the tomb, seemed to sensibly affect the weather-beaten hunter.

He discovered many ideas similar to those borne by the Indian warrior—often spoke of wandering in the great hunting-grounds beyond the setting sun. There evidently was some buried love, the remembrance of which often saddened his hours. He listened intently to Nat's words; and, during the winter spent in the cave, had often inquired, with the eager simplicity of a child, of heavenly truths. Our hero never failed to improve these moments, and was doubly repaid by the effect his words produced, and the increased friendship of his formidable ally. It would have been curious, if not sometimes amusing, to notice how the trapper leaned upon him in conversation, while Nat, when it came to action, looked up to him as a child would to a father.

On the present occasion he did not hesitate to take his advice. It certainly struck our hero as singular that it had not occurred to him before to do this. As stated, the hour was near midnight, and he had little fear of encountering any danger on the way. The distance around to the grove, where he had agreed to meet Irene, was a half-mile, and he was compelled to make a *detour* to avoid the Indian village. As there was no reason why Biddon

should remain in this particular spot, the two moved forward together.

While within the shade of the wood, the gloom was so great as to effectually conceal them from any night-walkers in the vicinity; but there were small belts of clearings to be crossed at long intervals, where there was naturally some risk run. At such places, one or two long, noiseless bounds carried the trapper over, while Nat slunk after him with short and nimble steps.

The entire distance was passed without anything occurring to excite alarm. Biddon knew the spot well enough to reach it from the directions Nat had given the day before; and before the latter suspected they were anywhere near it, his companion halted. Our hero was about to speak, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder.

"—sh! down! there's somebody besides us in these parts!"

They were still a number of yards from the arbor, as it might properly be termed, or these words would not have been added to what was already sufficient to make Nat as cautious as the prowling beast.

"Maybe," he whispered, "it's her—Irene—the lovely maiden herself."

"Wait, and lay low fur awhile."

Both sunk noiselessly downward until they blended with and seemed a part of the ground itself. Here they remained, silent and motionless, for the space of fifteen minutes, when the ears of both detected a slight rustle, like the footfall of a bird upon the leaves. Biddon drew his knife from his belt, clutched it firmly, while he gathered himself, ready for the fatal spring as soon as it became unavoidable. A suppressed "ugh!" was heard, and the next minute the form of an Indian glided by them, so close that either could have touched him with their hands, although the trained orbs of the trapper were barely sufficient to detect the faintest outline of the savage, who trod thus nigh to his own destruction.

"The way is clear now!" whispered Biddon, a moment after.

"Are you sure that wasn't Irene?" asked Nat, eagerly.

"Wagh! it was as bloody a redskin as e'er clinched ha'r or brained a baby in its mother's arms."

"What could he be doing here this time of night?"

"Don't you s'picion?"

"I have not the remotest idea."

"He war hyer, then, to see *us!*"

"How do you know that?"

"Ah! Nat, you've got a heap to larn yit. That red has see'd you when you had that talk with Irene, and he has been out here watching for you."

"But if he saw me, why didn't he kill me then? He might, for I'm very sure I didn't see anything of him. And, besides, I supposed the Indians believed we were dead, having gone down that dreadful cañon."

"Depend on it, Nat, the words Bill Biddon has to say jist now are as true as gospil. That red has see'd you, and he has s'pected the truth. He didn't want to send his arrer into yer until he war sure what you were up to, and then you can make up your mind he wouldn't have been long 'bout it. He hasn't been that sure that we'd wiped ourselves out but what he thought it wouldn't hurt him any to keep a watch, and he has been hyer ever since dark. Howsumever, you can make up your mind that he won't watch any longer for us."

It is perhaps proper to state, at this point, that this savage was the one who had seen the interview

between our hero and heroine, and whose motives and actions were really the same as remarked by the trapper. The lingering suspicions he entertained relating to the death of our two friends were now entirely dissipated.

"But maybe Irene is here also," ventured Nat, as the two once more moved forward, with much less caution than had characterized their movements up to this point.

"No, *sir!*" replied Biddon, with marked emphasis.

"I wish she was; it would so help matters along, particularly if she would have three splendid horses and something good to eat."

"Keep quiet, Nat; there's no use of gabbin' that way."

"I was only remarking—Jerusa——"

Ere yet the exclamation was out of his mouth, a cold shadow brushed by him, so close as to make him recoil, and feel the wind directly in his face.

"What's the matter?" asked Biddon, who noticed the broken exclamation.

"Didn't you see anything?"

"No, *sir*, nor you either."

"Biddon drew his knife from his belt."

"My gracious! that was a ghost then, as sure as you live."

"What do you mean?" asked Biddon, in a tone of vexation.

"Something as cold as ice brushed by my face, just as I spoke."

"Wagh! some owl or bat."

"No, it wasn't; it touched my feet, knees, and every part of me. Wonder if it was an Indian, Biddon?"

"Ef it war you wouldn't have had time to wonder. Some bird, I tell you."

"And I tell you it wasn't. I can tell a bird; it was nearly as tall as me, and as black as Egypt. It was nothing less than a ghost."

The trapper uttered an exclamation of displeasure; for, to own the truth, he was somewhat flustered himself. In fact, the occurrences which we have recorded in relation to the sister of our heroine were never fully explained to his mind. His remarks, more than once, had shown that it wore a supernatural appearance to him; and he was now prepared for something similar in regard to Irene. This impression was slight at present, and he strove to convince himself that Nat's vision was at fault;

but the positive assertions of the latter made him doubt and waiver, and he by no means felt easy. As if to upset him more completely, Nat remarked:

"You know, Biddon, how queer Imogene made her appearance to us, and like as not this one is going to do the same. I don't care much if she does. As long as I'm sure the things ain't real flesh-and-blood Indians, I know they can't hurt me, and I ain't half as much afraid."

And just here lay the difference between our two friends. There was a tinge of superstition in our hero, but probably his greatest peculiarity was that of viewing everything with a strong common sense. Thus, he was taught that if, in an Indian affray, he could get off without giving battle, even though victory was pretty sure to crown a well-directed effort, still, the chances of a broken head were infinitely less; and, consequently, it was best to retreat. For the same reason, if surrounded by invisible spirits, he could surely receive no physical harm from their hands, and it was utter foolishness to feel alarm. Biddon, possessed of the lion's courage, shared the lion's weakness. Their only danger was from that which could not be understood.

A hurried, whispered consultation was held, which ended in both deserting the place at once. Biddon led the way deeper into the wood, proceeding so as to leave as slight a trail as possible. A half-mile was passed, when they reached a deep ravine, in which they entered and halted. It was a long time since they had slept, and, rolling up in their blankets, they concluded to gain what repose they could. The trapper trusted to his acute sense of hearing to warn him of the approach of danger.

When Nat awoke, his companion was gone. At first he supposed him to be somewhere near him, and he lay still; but, when several hours passed without bringing him, he experienced some uneasiness. Noon came and went and brought no signs of the fugitive, and he was now tormented by the most intense fear for his companion. He was upon the point of setting out to search for him, when a series of yells, so wild and dreadful, were heard from the village, as to curdle his very blood.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH THERE IS A MOVE FORWARD.

A MOMENT after, the bushes at the top of the ravine parted, and an Indian bounded down and ran with the speed of wind directly through the gorge, within a few feet of our hero. The latter, as soon as the intruder had passed, hurried several yards further back and ensconced himself among a mass of undergrowth, where a pair of lynx-eyes would have failed to discover him.

The yells still continued, gradually sounding louder and nearer, as though a body of savages were approaching. A fearful suspicion that Biddon had fallen into their hands chained Nat to the spot. Presently, the tramp of feet was heard, and a score of Indians hurried through the ravine. Several leaped down at the very spot the first one did, while the others entered the ravine at the point where our two friends did the night before. Sev-

eral whoops were given in the gorge, which echoed with an appalling effect through the rocky sides. Ten minutes after they had passed, an occasional yell was heard in the distance.

As may be supposed, these proceedings occasioned not a little alarm and anxiety to Nat. What could be the object that led these Indians through the ravine? What meant their yells? It seemed the first must have been a flying fugitive from the others. Perhaps he had committed some crime—perhaps a murder; or, he might be a member from some hostile tribe who had stolen into the village and been discovered; or a prisoner who had broken his bonds and fled. No noise or confusion toward the Indian town told of any unwonted alarm. Now and then the faint yell in the woods showed that the pursuit was still maintained.

Not until dark durst Nat venture from his hiding-place. He clambered at once out of the ravine, and made his way toward the arbor which has been so often referred to. The absence of Biddon occasioned him much uneasiness, and he could not rid himself of the belief that he had fallen into their enemies' hands. Nat held a genuine friendship for the man, but let the matter be as it might, he felt

he could do him no good. If it were within the range of human possibility to escape, the trapper would do it himself.

When Nat reached the arbor it was quite dark. Admonished by what he had seen the night before, he was extremely cautious in his movements. He made his way within it, and seated himself in order to collect his thoughts, which, as yet, had taken no definite form. As he mused upon his experiences for the last day or two, he saw he had still a great risk to run. If the Indians were firmly convinced that he was dead, it was reasonable to suppose that Irene thought the same, and before hoping to succeed it was necessary to assure her of his existence by some means or other. Here lay the great difficulty. How to succeed was more than Nat could tell, and in all probability he would never have succeeded had not an unforeseen event assisted him.

While still musing, he heard a dull stamp upon the ground within a few feet of him. Nothing else was audible, and the manner in which it was repeated made him sure that his own presence was unknown. His perplexity was relieved by hearing the faint whinny of a horse! Nat's heart thrilled

within him as he reflected that Irene might be within reach of his voice. He uttered her name in a whisper, repeating it several times in a louder key until he was convinced she was not there. He now made his way carefully out of the arbor, and in a few minutes discovered two horses standing side by side and secured to the limb of the tree. An examination showed that each was furnished with an Indian bridle and saddle. Nat instantly vaulted into one of the latter.

"Surely, this saddle must have been made for me! It fits exactly."

It was rather a rash proceeding in him to thus venture upon a horse of which he knew nothing. He was really a fine horseman, however, and it was only through his utmost skill that he maintained his seat. The animal quieted down somewhat in a moment, though he still felt uneasy at the strange rider upon him.

"Now, if Irene was only here," mused Nat, "we wouldn't wait, but be off in a minute, though I should like to see old Biddon just now."

The reverie into which he was now falling was broken by a voice, uttered in a suppressed tone of caution.

"*Me-ento-en, Walgeando?*"*

"Yaw; Nix cum arous!" answered Nat, gravely.

An exclamation of surprise followed this, and instantly the question came in slightly broken English:

"Is that you, my friend?"

"Yes, yes; my gracious! it's me, Nat Todd. Is that you, Irene? I'm mighty glad to see you, being it's so dark, I can't catch the first glimpse of you; but nevertheless I'm just as glad."

"Hush! you may be heard. Where is your companion, the trapper?"

"Heaven save him! I haven't the least idea."

"He told me he would be here."

"Told you that! Where did you see him?"

"I saw a signal this afternoon in the woods that made me suspect one of you, at least, was living, although no other mortals could have survived that terrible descent into the cañon. I made my way to it and found Biddon, the man who would have saved the lives of my dear parents, had they

* This is pronounced a little differently from what it is spelled. In the Indian tongue in which it was uttered, it means, "Is that you, Walgeando?" It must be remembered that although our hero was acquainted with several Indian tongues, he knew nothing of this one.

heeded his advice in time. He told me how you two had escaped, and were only waiting for me to commence your flight. He asked me to bring three horses to this place, where I would find you and him. I did so, and one of the horses is gone! What can it mean?"

"It does look queer, but I shouldn't wonder if Biddon has taken one of the horses himself. It is just like him. We will wait until he comes."

"No, he told me if he was not here I must not wait a minute for him. He seemed excited about something, and made me promise to start as soon as you came. There is danger in our remaining. I told him what direction we would take, and he will follow us. We will start at once."

"Go on, Ireny, and lead the way."

The fair woman wheeled her horse's head toward the south, and started him on a rapid walk. The undergrowth and tree-branches compelled Nat to keep in the rear for the present, at least, although he had a hundred questions he burned to ask, and his heart beat so tumultuously with his great love that he felt he could not sustain it much longer. Once or twice he ventured a remark, but the snapping limbs kept his head bobbing incessantly,

and generally ended each sentence with an impatient ejaculation. Irene seemed to glide like a bird through the wood, neither halting nor dodging, and yet avoiding every branch or obstruction.

An hour's riding, and they emerged into a more open country. Nat's horse leaped to the side of Irene's, and he commenced his questions.

"What direction do you intend to follow, Irene? Toward the Oregon trail?"

"Yes; that is the one your friend mentioned. God alone knows where it will take us!"

"Why—why, you do not regret this step?" asked Nat in astonishment.

"No, no; but oh! I am so excited to think I will perhaps see my dear, dear, long-lost sister again. Does she think I am living?"

"No—gracious alive! She has never thought of you—that is, I mean she hasn't had the least idea that you are living, or that she should ever meet you on this earth again. *Won't* she be glad to see you?"

"I am so afraid we shall be followed by the Indians in the morning. They will kill us both, if they do!"

"Can't these horses trot any?"

"Yes—there are none swifter in the tribe; still, I am afraid."

"*I ain't!*" exclaimed Nat; "they'll have to go over my dead body to get you, and I think when it comes to the fighting part, you will find Bill Biddon about. But, Ireny, what was all that noise in the village about, this afternoon?"

"A warrior from another tribe killed two children of ours, and was seen and was pursued."

"Did they get him?"

"His pursuers have not returned. I am afraid they will not, and when they find I am gone they will be doubly enraged."

"It won't do any good, for Nat Todd is around just now. I just thought, Ireny, I saw a ghost last night."

"A ghost! what do you mean?" asked his companion in astonishment.

"A spook—a spirit."

"Where did you see it?"

"In the arbor, from which we have started."

"Were you there last night?"

"Certainly; Biddon, too. We were looking for you."

"It was *me* you saw."

"You?" repeated Nat, amazed in turn. "Why didn't you speak and let us know who you were? We might have started then, and been a long ways on our journey by this time."

"I did not know you. I found an Indian was watching me before you came; and when I heard your voices I thought more had come, and glided out so as to avoid them. You were directly in my path or I should not have passed so close to you. I heard you speak after I passed, and I once thought it might be you, but I was too frightened to venture back again."

"Why do you think you were watched?"

"I saw the savage the night before. He kept his eyes upon me during the day in a manner that excited my suspicion, though after he had gone last night he seemed to have given over all fear."

Our two friends had now crossed the open space over which Nat had been pursued by the savages, as mentioned in a former chapter. Striking off to the right, they reached the margin of the river, beside which they continued their journey. The country was open, but of a rugged, stony character.

The moon was not so full as usual, and objects could not be distinguished at a greater distance than twenty yards. Irene, who had wandered to great distances, on several occasions, with her tribe, knew what direction to take to reach the Oregon trail, and Nat certainly had sufficient cause to remember it.

"If we could conceal our trail," remarked Irene, "I would not feel that fear which torments me."

"We cannot leave many signs in this flinty earth."

"Enough to guide them as well as if they saw us."

"When it comes to that, as I said before, we have horses which are surely able to run as well as any of the rascally tribe."

"I know that and yet I cannot."—

Irene suddenly paused with a gasp of alarm.

"What's the matter?" breathlessly asked Nat.

"*Something is following us,*" replied his companion, in a hoarse whisper.

Nat wheeled as quick as lightning in his saddle and peered into the darkness behind him.

"Do you see anything?" asked Irene.

"Yes; there is something, but I believe it's only a hungry wolf; I just now saw it trot backwards out of sight."

"Thank heaven! the rustle of every bush disturbs me. I am glad that it is nothing more than a wild animal."

"You are frightened too easily; you should ——"

"—sh! there it is again, in front of us. Look! do you see it?"

A shadow crossed their path, making long, bounding leaps, as if cantering in sport.

"He is probably hungry, and imagines if he cuts up some fancy capers for us, we'll make him a present of something to eat."

"He surely acts strange. I should think he would make some noise."

They conversed still, their horses walking rapidly and breaking into a canter when a level portion was reached. The supposed wolf kept pace with them sometimes whisking so close to their horses' heads as to startle them and then disappearing down the river-bank. Nat regarded his actions as eccentric, and had no objection to them so long as he refrained from bringing any of his companions to

him. He could not help noticing the alarm of his fair companion. When the wolf appeared unusually close she started as much as her animal, and kept her gaze wandering continually as if searching for the dreaded brute.

"What time of night do you suppose it is?" asked Nat, in hope of diverting her thoughts.

"I wish that thing would keep away," she replied, without heeding his question.

"Are you alarmed?"

"I do not feel at ease as long as that is wheeling around us so strangely."

"I will set you at ease in a minute, then."

Nat cocked his rifle, and held it ready to fire the instant the thing appeared. In a moment he saw it tumbling like a dark bundle a few yards in advance. He brought his gun to his shoulder, took as good aim as the circumstances would permit, and fired.

The supposed wolf instantly rose on his hind-legs, gave vent to a blood-chilling yell, at the same second that a tomahawk whizzed within a few inches of Nat's eyes. Then it shot away like a meteor and disappeared in the darkness.

"Jerusalem! that's the queerest wolf I ever fired

at. Who knowed he carried concealed weapons about him," remarked Nat, after the first pause of astonishment.

"It was the Indian who watched me. He has followed us," whispered Irene.

"If I had had the slightest idea that wolf walked on two legs instead of four, I'd have taken more pains with my aim than I did, and done something more than just to lame him a bit. But, Ireny, that's a queer way for an Indian to do. What do you make of it?"

"I know not why he did it, unless he intended to wait until we stopped, and then hurry back to some of his companions and attack us."

"My gracious! he might have shot me a dozen times, and I never knowed it until he hit me. Only think how he has been sneaking round us, and we talking all the time and not dreaming who he was."

"He had nothing with him, or he would have shot you. His object was only to watch us. I guess he was hurt pretty badly."

"Not enough to prevent his getting back, and bringing a lot of the imps on our trail. I tell you, Irene, we must get over ground faster than this.

I wasn't scar't much before this wolf affair. I didn't believe the dogs had any idea that Nat Todd was still above the ground. The way that one throwed his tomahawk at my head showed that he was pretty certain I wasn't there yet."

Both horses struck into a canter, which gait was kept until daylight. Only then they ceased through fear of being overtasked. Nat reined in close to the river-bank, just as the sun rose over the prairie. Their animals were magnificent ones, of wonderful speed and bottom; but the long ride had sensibly fatigued them, and it was a wise course to give them a couple of hours' rest. Despite the romantic situation in which Nat found himself—with the care of the being who had visited his dreams for over a year—the happy owner of a love so great as to bring a scornful laugh when the thought of Sarah Almina in Maine happened to come to him—the victim of a tormenting fear of pursuit—despite all these, we repeat, the most pressing trouble was his appetite! He had fasted a long time, and remarked to his companion that he must secure something pretty soon, or he should be tempted to eat her! Leaving her with the horses, he wandered down the river-bank, and was fortunate enough

to bring down a fat duck that rose from the water's edge. With this he hastened back to Irene, who, with his flint and steel, had already kindled a fire. The duck was soon picked, dressed, skewered, roasted and eaten—he, good-naturedly, compelling his fair charge to feast to her utmost upon it. During the halt, the horses had cropped their full, and were well prepared to resume their toilsome march. The two remounted and struck off toward the south, hoping to accomplish a long distance ere nightfall.

When about five miles further upon their journey Nat's horse trod upon a rolling stone, and stumbled. As he recovered himself he limped badly, and dropped into a painful walk. Nat dismounted, and, upon examining it, saw with unfeigned alarm that the ankle was sprained. The horse could be of no further use to him.

"Let him rest a moment," said Irene, "and we will ride slowly."

Hoping he might be deceived, Nat let the horse rest a short time; but, upon starting him, the injured leg was found to be still worse.

"It's no use," he said; "the longer he stands the worse he will get. He must be let alone to himself.

He will be able to get enough grass to keep him alive. He can't do us any more good. Go ahead, Irene, and I will walk beside you."

This misfortune affected his companion greatly. She urged Nat to take her own horse, even offering to dismount herself if he deemed the load too great; but, of course, this offer was declined, the excuse being that the entire strength and wind of her animal would be needed for her own safety.

"But if pursued?" she asked.

"*You* can get away, at least."

"And what will become of you?"

"Heaven bless your sweet soul, I wouldn't mind dying for you, to show you how much I love—I think of you. But don't be frightened, Ireny, for I tell you that trapper is about, and will turn up somewhere at the right minute."

"My horse surely is able to carry us both."

"Well, my dear, when it comes to the worst, perhaps I'll mount beside you and try the bottom he seems to possess; but, as it is, I'll try walking a while. I declare, I shouldn't like anything better than a ten-mile tramp, just for exercise. Such a walk ought to have been taken before."

Thus pacified, Irene consented to Nat's plan,

keeping her horse on a walk, in the face of his urgent request that he should proceed faster. He left his horse where he had failed, his trappings with him. He had some hope that, if pursued, the chase would be given up as useless when it was discovered how well-mounted the fugitives were. He knew, however, that if the disabled horse was found, their enemies would press on with renewed diligence. Another probability, upon which he based, perhaps, his strongest hope, was, that the start obtained would afford them time to reach Lewis river, along whose banks there was good reason to expect emigrants at this season of the year.

We might, with justice, say, that the time passed pleasantly to Nat. There was just enough exercise to give a zest to his conversation, and he kept up a continuous stream of talk. He went over the whole history of his adventures since leaving Maine, not omitting a promise he gave a New York publisher to furnish him with an account of his travels, upon his return to civilization. He believed his experience was worth giving the world, and expressed his determination to do it as soon as he was settled down and *married.* As he uttered the

last word, he stole a sly glance from under the corner of his hat at Irene to see the effect produced. She appeared interested in what he said, but nothing beyond that. Then he related a long story about Sarah Almina in Lubec, adding emphatically that he never thought anything of her, and she was only fit for such a fellow as Bill Hankins. Had Irene Merment been educated in civilized society, she could have easily read the simple heart of Nat Todd, and comprehended exactly the situation in which he must have once stood with the lady that so excited his ire; but the guileless being little dreamt the truth. The pointed, palpable hits of admiration—in fact, of love—from him, were entirely lost upon her. Her silence was taken for acquiescence, and Nat grew bolder and bolder, until he found Irene staring wonderingly at him, totally at a loss to understand his meaning. Fearful, then, that he had gone too far, he blushed finely, coughed loudly, and stammered foolishly. It might have been that she had an inkling of what lay at the bottom of his words, but she betrayed it by no word or action.

At intervals, Irene swept the entire horizon, on the alert for any suspicious sign, and it was

not probable that her trained eyes would fail to detect the approach of danger. The excitement of her new situation, the thrilling hope, the agonizing fear, almost unnerved her. For a long time she would calm down and listen attentively to Nat's words, and then suddenly start and glance around her, alarmed at her remissness of duty.

At noon, when they halted for a short rest, she took a searching look, as usual, behind her, and Nat noticed that she started, and continued her gaze an extraordinary length of time.

"Do you see anything to alarm you?" he asked.

"There is a buffalo or horseman in the distance. Look away yonder, where the sky seems to touch the prairie."

The slight elevation she had, aided by her powerful vision, gave her a better view than Nat; but the latter, after following the direction of her finger, and straining his orbs, detected a small, quivering speck, in relief against the blue horizon. It was like a star seen at noonday, difficult to find in the field of vision, but perfectly distinct when discovered. It was certainly approaching, as it visibly increased in size and clearness.

"What do you make of it?" she asked.

"My gracious! I can't see anything but a spot."

"It's a man riding on a full run; and, I fear, the Indian who troubled us last night."

"My gun is loaded, pretty near to the muzzle," remarked Nat, shutting one eye and squinting into the barrel, "and if that wolf in Indian's clothing, or that Indian in wolf's clothing, gets within hailing distance, he'll imagine a thunderbolt smashed against his forehead and exploded. No danger of any missing this time."

"Be ready, for I cannot see how it can be avoided. He is fearless, and does not slacken the speed of his horse in the least."

"Don't be frightened, Ireny, for I'll fight till death for you."

He gave her a look of honest, devoted love, and for the first time Nat saw a deep tinge suffuse her face to the temples. His heart throbbed wildly, and he felt able to vanquish a whole tribe of screaming Indians.

Meanwhile the horseman was rapidly approaching, and the gaze of our two friends was fixed upon him with the most intense anxiety. Nigher and nigher he came, until Nat cocked his rifle and held it ready for instant use. Suddenly he smiled,

let the hammer down again, and remarked to Irene:

"Bill Biddon! as sure as you're the finest creature in the universe."

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE TALE.

THE trapper approached on a rapid canter, and, when within hailing distance, shouted:

"What you waitin' for?"

"Why, you," returned Nat.

"*There's no time to stop!* the imps are on your tracks!"

"Where? how do you know this?"

"I see'd 'em gitten' ready, and I started out ahead of 'em last night."

"Will they overtake us? What will be the end of this, Biddon?" asked Nat, in a lower tone, as the trapper rode up.

"There'll be some ha'r-raising done, sure."

"Jerusalem!" yelled our hero, springing in the air, "why don't you get ripping mad, Biddon? I never swore in my life, but it seems it would be a

relief to, now. What is going to become of that lovely maiden there?"

"She needn't be tuk—her horse can't be cotched by any four-pegged animal."

During this brief conversation Irene sat silent. Her agitation had given way to a settled calmness. She was pale and bloodless, but a strong resolution seemed to sustain her soul. Biddon, as Nat uttered the last remark, glanced at her a moment, and then, leaning over his saddle, motioned for Nat to come nigher.

"See 'yer, Todd, get on my hoss and put with that gal. I'll cover your trail and keep them painted imps behind till you're out the reach——"

"How?"

"By droppin' a pill among 'em, and ef it comes to clus quarters, pitch in and go under in glorious style. Come, Todd, you're young, and love that gal. The days for sich feelin's has passed with Bill Biddon. Come, hop on and be off."

"NEVER!" repeated Nat, stepping back, and uttering the sentiments of his very soul. "You've saved my life more than once, Bill Biddon, and if I ever take advantage of you, may the Just One above strike me dead in my tracks!"

It may seem a contradiction to our readers for us to represent Nat Todd, at the commencement of his published career, as guilty of timidity, if not sometimes cowardice, and to picture him as possessed of the most genuine courage, as we have above, and in other instances in these pages. But, in doing so, we are confident we have done no violation to his true character. It is a question with many whether he who lacks in bravery can ever rid himself of his deficiency—many affirming it to be a defect which, being inborn, will ever cling to a person. While there is strong reason for this view of the case, it must be remembered that the bravest have manifested fear at the dawn of danger. The man who turns pale at the commencement of battle is the most valiant soldier. It is the *newness* of danger that alarms the courageous. Could a man who is known in civilized society as a true hero be removed to the midst of a vast wilderness, where he had the wily Indian to encounter, his timidity would be mistaken for the most contemptible cowardice; and yet, in all probability, the same man would afterward distinguish himself by his deeds of daring. At the first appearance of peril, Nat Todd was apt to shrink, and as long as it was not

criminality to retreat, he would do so. There was a spice of shrewdness in his character, and, while still a tyro in the western wilds, there is no disguising the fact of his timidity; but his long acquaintanceship with Indian life, together with his love of adventure, made him in some cases even reckless. The magnanimous conduct of Biddon had strengterened his admiration into the sincerest friendship, and there is no sacrifice that Nat would not have willingly made for him. This was why he repelled his offer most emphatically.

The trapper, after this decided refusal, dropped his head a moment as if in meditation.

"Are we not losing time?" gently reminded Irene.

"Yes, we ar'. Nat, I'd like to walk some. Jist get on and ride."

"I shan't do it, Biddon; so don't say any more about it. I would as lief walk or run a dozen miles more as not. I understand what you are at, but it won't do."

"Ef you had a hoss——"

"He give out, several miles back."

"I know; I found him and feared the imps would come onto him. So I led him down to the

river, put a bullet between his eyes, tied a big stone round his neck, and tumbled him into deep water, whar you'll have to hunt a while to find him."

"Let us go on, Biddon, for every minute seems a mile lost. What do you propose to do?"

"Thar's no use of cuttin' round the stump; thar's got to be a fight made. 'Bout two miles further ahead thar's a place whar we'll strike camp and make a stand. The gal might get off, while we stayed to fight, but it wouldn't do to trust her. Ef we should go under, she'd be distracted and wouldn't know what to do. Ef she had a rifle we'd stand a better chance. Howsumever, it's no use talkin'; so, let's move."

Our friends moved forward at a rapid walk, Biddon conversing, and imparting to Irene and Nat the course he intended to pursue. He had left the latter, it will be remembered, in the ravine. In doing so, it was his intention to convey to Irene, by some means or other, his presence in the wood, and return to Nat by the time he awoke. But he was compelled to maneuver the whole forenoon around the village before he succeeded, and it was only then by a most fortunate accident. Near

night Irene found opportunity to steal to the wood for a moment. But this movement, guarded as it was, did not escape the eagle-eyes of the Indians. Such a step upon the part of Irene at any other time would have been scarcely noticed; but, after what had transpired, they suspected everything. Irene was stealthily followed, and it was only by the most consummate skill that the trapper avoided a collision with them. Their watchfulness did not escape him, and it was for this reason he remained behind. The confusion, occasioned by the discovery and pursuit of the Indian scout, afforded Irene an opportunity of getting the horses mentioned to the *rendezvous*. Just at dusk, Biddon visited this spot, secured one of the horses, and withdrew into the recesses of the forest. He lingered in the rear until nearly morning, when he saw, unmistakably, that her flight had been discovered and a pursuit was preparing. He started on the trail of the two fugitives at once, and, by dint of hard riding, overtook them, as mentioned.

"Yonder," said Biddon, pointing ahead, "is the place whar the stand must be made. Yas, sir."

A half-hour's ride brought them to the spot; and, as it is necessary (in order to understand what follows) for the reader to have an idea of the situation of our friends, we must pause a moment to describe it.

The spot chosen was on the open prairie, a quarter of a mile distant from the wooded bottom of the river which they had hitherto followed. This location was selected by the trapper in order to avoid any concealment which might shelter their enemies. They could only approach over an open plain, where they would be targets for two rifles. Here our friends commenced at once to construct a fort. Indeed, from the appearance of things, it was not at all improbable that the materials they used had answered that purpose before. There were some twenty or thirty huge boulders lying in an irregular circle. The best idea of their location and size can be given, by supposing a *butte* (a vast, towering rock) to have split in over a score of pieces, with force just sufficient to lay them twenty feet from the center.

The prodigious strength of Biddon, assisted by Nat, soon completed the circle. The rocks were rolled together, the chinks filled in with smaller

fragments, so as to afford no entrance for a stray bullet or arrow. When the fort was completed, it was found that a breastwork averaging about four feet in height was afforded. Behind this they could kneel and fire with deadly aim. The rocks whose immense weight prevented their lifting them to the top were rolled against the base, and, viewed from the outside, the little citadel presented no insignificant appearance.

The trapper's next step was to take the two horses and lead them far out on the prairie, describing an arc of a vast circle, and then approach the river-bottom at a point below the fort, that is toward the mouth of the river. Here he rode one into the river, leading the other, and waded them several hundred yards down-stream, when he came ashore, and, securing them both, made his way back on a run. The object of this movement was to preserve the use of the animals to themselves. If their trail should be followed by the Indians, it would mislead them at the point of entrance into the water, and the presence of the whites would prevent any extended search being made. Biddon did not forget to fill a small, peculiar canteen, which he ever carried about him, from the river.

"Thar's no tellin' how long we'll be cooped-up thar, b'ars and beavers ef there is, and the stuff can't do no hurt," he remarked to himself.

As he bounded over the boulders before Irene and Nat, who were conversing rather earnestly just then, his eye flashed with the fire of youth, and his heart throbbed faster than was its wont; for he felt he was shortly to engage in one of those struggles of life and death in which he had so reveled in years agone.

"Biddon," observed Nat, rather thoughtfully, "I cannot help thinking we might have improved our time better in flight. We could have made a long distance, it seems, and reached a point where these savages would not dare to fall on us."

"Todd," replied Biddon, with a quiet half-smile, "when I first knowed you I used to call you 'Greeny,' and I sometimes thinks it's yer best handle yit. Howsumever, it's as plain as that ha'r on your upper lip—which can't be see'd very well —that you don't understand the ways of redskins yet. They'd have follered us fur days, and overtaken us at a place whar we wouldn't have had a tree, rock or lump of earth to cover us, and they would have wiped every one of us out.

Them imps," added the trapper, speaking in a whisper, and fixing his eyes upon those of our hero, "them imps, sir, will be in sight in less nor a half-hour!"

Nat recoiled at these words, and they did not escape the ear of Irene, who only turned a shade paler, and compressed her thin, bloodless lips. It was now near the middle of the afternoon, and the glances of Biddon toward the west showed that he expected the appearance of danger every moment. At intervals, he mounted the rocky wall of their fortress, and, shading his eyes with his hand, looked long and searchingly in the distance. Some twenty minutes passed thus, when, while standing upon the wall, he turned toward Irene——

"See 'yer, my little duck, them peepers of yourn can take in a bigger stretch of perarie than Bill Biddon's; so jist come this way and take a squint off yender. Thar's 'sign,' ef I ain't most powerful mistook."

He stooped and lifted Irene in his brawny arms as if she were an infant. He then seated her upon his shoulder, with about as much effort as he would have raised his rifle there, and said:

"Now take a squint, sich as you kin."

"My gracious! ain't she lovely?" remarked Nat, in an undertone. "Just view that white face, them black eyes, gazing way off yonder, them magnificent plumes, and her black hair rising and falling in this soft wind—jest see her sitting there, Nat Todd, I say, like a heavenly bird that has perched on the old trapper's shoulder. Jerusalem! only imagine how Almina will feel when I bring her home with me—that is if I ever get there."

"Let me down," she said to Biddon.

"See nothin'?"

"They are coming! Look, you can see them."

"Ya-s s-i-r!" slowly repeated Biddon, as he looked again. "Them's them, sure, and they're ridin' as though they didn't know they war hastenin' to destruction. See 'yer," he added, removing his gaze to his two companions, "it's time we understood how things is goin' to be managed, so I'll make my speech. You see the upper part of that rock stickin' out thar, my little duck? Wal, as you happens to have no shooter about you, and will only be in the way, you may crawl in under thar, and keep snug and clus. None of thar arrers or bullets will be apt to touch your purty noddle."

Irene hesitated a moment before complying; but, as it was plainly the best course she could adopt, she obeyed. Nat and Biddon had purposely arranged a corner of their fortress so as to shelter her, and it answered its end admirably. They added, as an extra caution, that she should not look out or expose herself until told to, and of course to all this she promised a willing obedience.

"Now," added the trapper, in a husky voice, the nearest approach he could make to a whisper, "we must understand the case," as they say down in the settlements. Ef there's to be any hailin' or talkin', I'll do it. Ef they make a dash for us, we'll blaze away together and draw knives and at them. But you must never bark with your shooter at the same time I does, or they'll ride in afore we ken load. I'll pick out each mark fur yer, and you mustn't shoot any pipe-stems or scorch my ear agin."

"How'd you know I shot my gun that time?" asked Nat, in amazement.

Biddon gave his usual quiet smile, and replied:

"I didn't know it then, Todd, or I'm afeared I'd 've scorched *you*. But after I got up among them Hudson-Bay fellers. I got to thinkin' 'bout

it, and wondered how I was sich a fool as to think any of them *sperits* done it. Howsumever, that ain't hyer nor there; we're in fur a knock-down fight this time. As I said, you must never fire till I tell you; don't show your head, and keep your peepers peeled. Them redskins are comin' along purty well," he added, in a matter-of-fact tone.

That they were coming along pretty well was self-evident. They were only a mile or two away, and were riding promiscuously, their principal object being to get ahead as fast as possible. Their plumes could be seen rising and falling, and their gaudy dress flaunting in the wind. Nat and Biddon were crouched in under their breastwork, their rifle-muzzles just protruding from the loop-holes, and their eyes watching every motion over the gleaming barrels.

Onward galloped the Indians, without abating their speed in the least until within a furlong, when they suddenly reined up at sight of the curious-looking fortress before them. Their looks and gestures showed their suspicions to be aroused concerning it. Their hands were frequently extended toward it, and their guttural words could now and then be heard. As they stood thus, Biddon

carefully noted the appearance of each. There were seven well mounted, two of whom were furnished with rifles, which weapons they rendered as conspicuous as possible. The Indian who seemed to take the lead was furnished with a flowing mantle which streamed over his horse as he careered over the prairie. Each was daubed in war-paint; and, take them all in all, they were a savage, villainous-looking set, whose malignity shone in their basilisk eyes. They surveyed the rocks a few moments, and scattered in different directions over the prairie, carefully avoiding to approach any closer.

"Slip to t'other side," whispered Biddon, "and keep your shooter ready, but don't pull the trigger till I tell you."

The Indians now commenced circling around the little fort, separating and wheeling until they had completely surrounded it.

How many do you make?" asked the trapper.

"I haven't counted them," replied Nat, "but I should suppose there are about seventy-five."

"Wagh! jist seven; ef we hadn't the gal with us, I wouldn't like better fun than wipin' them out. Keep docile, and I'll draw bead on 'em soon."

Although the fugitives had carefully concealed

"Onward galloped the Indians."

themselves, the Indians were not to be deceived. Their wheelings and turnings were like the gyrations of birds in the air, and finally a couple of arrows were sent into the fort; but it brought no response from those within. A couple of savages started at full gallop, as if to ride over the breast-work, but were careful to hold up before they reached it.

Suddenly they came together in a knot on the eastern side, and, halting a moment, dashed away with a loud yell.

"Good!" exclaimed Nat, "they think we ain't here, and have gone on. We will get away yet."

"You're green yet, Todd. Don't you understand thar deviltry? They've purtended that, jist to draw us out. It riles me considerable, I allow, fur 'em to take Bill Biddon to be sich a fool. I'll drop one of 'em for that insult ef they don't do nothin' else."

"All at once their enemies wheeled, and, giving another yell, came at full gallop toward the fugitives.

"Another trick," admonished the trapper. "Keep your fire; they'll stop in a minute."

So it proved—the Indians reining up while still at a good distance, and repeating their maneuvers as before. This was continued for nearly an hour, when, losing patience, the war was commenced by the redskins. Coming up within several hundred yards, they again separated and commenced riding backward and forward at different points, displaying, while they did so, some of the finest horsemanship in the world. They leaned over upon the side of their animals opposite the whites in such a manner that nothing but the point of their feet was visible over the horse's back, and in this disposition discharged their arrows and the two rifles, either under the animal's neck or belly. As the latter turned in their circuit, their skillful riders dropped to the other side as quick as thought.

"'Tis an old game, but a dangerous one," remarked the trapper. "I've seen the Comanches of the south use the same trick, and, say what they will, it's a nasty one. Thar's so many of 'em at it, we must stop 'em. Yas, sir."

A perfect storm of arrows rained in upon the whites, and their situation, at most, was a perilous one. It was by no means impossible that they should be struck, protected as well as they were.

"Todd!" called Biddon, in a whisper.

"Well, what do you wish?"

"'Tis an old game, as I said afore, they're tryin', and must be stopped. I war in such a scrape as this when I was summat younger nor now. 'Twas down in what they call Injin Territory. Me and a chap got cooped up, with the heathen firin' thar pizened arrers at us, and never givin' us a chance to see 'em, floppin' over thar hosses like that. Howsumever, we come up to 'em. Thar's two or three spots in a hoss whar this rifle of mine will send a bullet through slick and clean, and give the imp his last sickness on t'other side. 'Tain't every one as can do it, 'cause they're purty sure to strike a bone. But hyer goes."

The trapper followed the motions of one of the horses for a moment and then fired. The frenzied beast, with a wild snort, bounded high in the air, falling backward and crushing his mortally-wounded rider beneath him.

"I haven't forgot the spot," Biddon remarked, with an exulting sound like the click of his gun in his throat. "I haven't forgot the spot, and I'll try the same thing again."

His weapon was reloaded in an incredibly short

space of time and pointed through the same loop-hole. But this unexpected demonstration made the Indians more cautious. They immediately retreated, leaving their fallen comrade and horse doubled up together. Before they had reached a safe distance, the fatal rifle of the trapper sounded again as an incautious enemy exposed his back, and the latter tumbled headlong from his animal.

"Five left," he laughed, as he proceeded to load his gun. "Keep quiet, Todd, and you'll have a chance."

"It's getting along toward night, Biddon; what will you do then?"

"Wait till sundown comes."

The Indians, after consulting a few minutes, rode away a half-mile, when they disappeared in the river-bottom.

"What does that mean," asked Nat.

"They're goin' to lay off till dark and fix on some devilish trick. You can talk a while to the gal, for thar's no fear of thar showin' themselves in reach of this shooter for a while. Hold on now, Biddon, you dog," muttered the trapper to himself. "Thar's a splendid ha'r-raise for yer."

"The exulting trapper gave a defiant yell, holding the gory trophy aloft."

Dropping his gun and drawing his knife, he leaped over the breast-work and ran out upon the prairie to the spot where the first savage had fallen. Here he stooped and scalped the dead savage, and, while thus engaged, the report of a rifle was heard in the river-bottom. The Indians witnessed this deed, which they could not prevent, and had fired at him. The exulting trapper gave a defiant yell, and, holding the gory trophy aloft, made his way back to shelter on a slow walk.

"Ef they hadn't toted off t'other varmint, I'd had his top-knot too," he remarked, as he stepped into the fort again.

Night was slowly settling over the prairie, and a few clouds were rolling up from the west. There was to be a faint moon, which was already in the sky.

"I hope 'twill be dark as a wolf's mouth," said Biddon; "ef it is, we'll outwit the heathen, sure. Yas, sir."

"If these clouds out yonder sail across the moon's face, you'll have your wish, Biddon, I think."

"How does the little gal stand it?" he asked, looking down at Irene, who had withdrawn from her concealment, and was seated near him.

"I am not much frightened, but I do dread falling into their hands again. I am sure they would kill me if I did."

"Don't be scar't—don't be scar't, my little one; they'll have to trample over Bill Biddon, and, I reckon, *another chap,* afore they reach your purty little pictur'."

"The truest words you ever said," responded Nat, warmly.

Three hours passed without any incident occurring worthy of being mentioned. By this time it was well into the night. The clouds spoken of were slowly floating before the moon, rendering the darkness exceedingly variable—sometimes so great as to prevent our friends from distinguishing each other's forms; at other times a partial view of the prairie, for twenty or thirty yards, was obtained. Biddon had occupied himself in passing stealthily around the interior of the fort, to prevent the insidious approach of his enemies. A detached conversation was continued for a time in undertones, but the apprehensions of each finally kept all silent. Before night set in, Biddon proposed making no attempt to escape until the second night; but, from some cause, changed his mind. He

affirmed that they must get off that night, or their case would be beyond hope.

Once or twice, when the light favored, a dusky horseman was seen carefully reconnoitering their position; and, by placing the ear to the ground, the footfalls of their animals could be heard. They were evidently circling around the fugitives, to prevent their making off in the darkness. This was continued so steadily and so long, as to satisfy the trapper that their enemies intended to keep them besieged until nature would compel them to give in; and, as they would naturally expect the whites to remain in concealment as long as possible, their watch would be closer each succeeding night. This was why Biddon came to the determination to make the attempt upon the present night.

Nat, having received permission to fire at anything that offered, discharged his gun at a dusky object which flitted to view in the distance; but with what effect he could not tell, as no yell or tramp of feet succeeded it. A half-hour after, the moon shone through a rift in the clouds, and revealed to the astonished gaze of our friends a solitary horse, facing them, not more than fifty

yards distant. He stood like a statue, and was without a rider. When the moonlight was obscured again, his outline could be still distinguished, standing as motionless as before. Biddon was unable to fully comprehend the meaning of this singular apparition, but it only served to render him doubly cautious. While still wondering, he felt a touch upon his arm, and looking around, distinguished the pale, terror-stricken face of Irene looking up in his own.

"There is some one just outside the fort!" she whispered. "I heard him move!"

The trapper nodded, and motioned her to regain her concealment. On his hands and knees he passed around the area of the fort, listening at every inch, until his wonderful skill enabled him to locate his enemy. A savage, he was satisfied, was crouching under cover of one of the boulders on the outside. Waving his hand for the amazed Nat to maintain a perfect silence, he laid his rifle softly upon the ground, drew his knife and gathered his strength for a spring. His leap was similar to that which a deer makes to pass a high fence—a sort of sidelong bound, with an agility which carried him over like a cat. His calculation was

incredibly exact, for he literally came down upon the shoulders of the unsuspecting Indian. A grip —a short struggle—a groan and a gasp, and the trapper bounded back again into the fort with another ghastly scalp at his girdle.

"He's done for," he chuckled.

"Isn't that his horse still standing yonder?" asked Nat.

Biddon looked toward the point indicated, and saw that the animal remained in the same motionless attitude. He paused an instant, then stepped lightly upon the prairie again, and ran rapidly toward the horse. The animal probably mistook him for his Indian master, for he made no resistance or motion to flee. Biddon seized his bridle and led him forward to the fort.

"Todd!" he hurriedly called, "step out 'yer, quick!"

"What's wanting?" asked that person, bounding beside him.

"The time to travel ar come. That Injin I jist now rubbed out is the one with that big blanket flyin' over his shoulder; this ar his horse. Git on him, throw his blanket over yer neck, take the gal behind yer, and cover her up with it, and put.

They'll take yer fur that chap stiffened out thar, and when you get clar of 'em go down the bottom whar I left t'other hosses; you'll then have one apiece, and put like blazes, and you'll give 'em the slip."

"And you?"

"Never mind me; I'll foller you soon. Irene, this way, quick!"

The maiden was by his side in an instant. She had heard his plan and understood it. Nat was given to rebel, at first, at leaving his companion in the rear, but the latter was imperative, and threatened to shoot him if he hesitated.

"Hug him close," he cautioned Irene, "and let that blanket swing over yer; and, Todd, make a few circles round like, so as to blind thar eyes, and when yer get cla'r of their sight, do what you war told to."

A moment after, Nat Todd was cantering over the prairie on the dead Indian's horse, with Irene clinging to him. He distinguished several horsemen, riding on a walk, after getting out of sight of the fort, and, to deceive them, followed Biddon's advice—imitating their movements, and gradually edging away from them, until, seeing the coast

clear, he made a straight line to the river-bottom. The whinny of Irene's horse, as they entered, guided their search to the two animals left there by the trapper. Irene mounted her own animal, leaving the other for Biddon, and she and Nat once more struck to the eastward on a rapid gallop.

The trapper listened to the receding steps of the horse which bore the two away from the fort, and did not change his position until they were beyond hearing, and, as he well judged, had succeeded perfectly with the stratagem.

"'Twas a good trick," he muttered; "but ef it hadn't been for the gal, Bill Biddon wouldn't have allowed 'em to do it. It would have lost too fine a chance for a ha'r-raise. B'ars and beavers, it would!"

He commenced debating his own chances of escape. Now that the others were safe, his greatest care was gne; but it would not have been characteristic of the man had he neglected his own. A few minutes' thought decided his course.

The dead Indian was lifted in his arms and carried to the spot where his horse was first seen. Here he was stretched flat upon his back, and his

limbs straightened. Biddon, deeming Nat had gone far enough to risk a discovery, gave a loud whoop and retreated within the fort.

In a few moments two savages rode cautiously toward the spot from which the sound had emanated. They reconnoitered the dead body a moment, but finally approached. A careful examination followed, revealing the alarming fact that their comrade had not fallen by a bullet, but by the knife of their enemy. To have done this, of course the struggle must have occurred at this spot upon the prairie, and the white man must have fled after committing the deed. They raised no yell, but rode in a body to the fort, and, after several feints, entered it. The whites were gone!

Now ascended a yell, such as a score of demons might be supposed to give, and the baffled savages galloped away toward the river-bottom. When fairly out of sight, one of the boulders on the outside of the breastwork pitched forward, and the form of Bill Biddon rose to view.

"Reds is reds, and fools is fools, and ef ever they war takin' in bootiful, that ar' time is jist about now. So Bill Biddon thinks. Wagh!"

Dropping his head, he ran rapidly in the direction

of the river-bottom, intending to find his horse and follow our hero and heroine as he had promised. This required a longer time than he expected; but he secured him at last, and, as he emerged from the bottom, he struck into a full run, and set up a shout of exultation. Hardly had the echoes died away, when four mounted Indians burst after him, discharging two rifles at the same time. Biddon answered the shot, and its effect was told by a frenzied yell and fall of one of the horsemen.

"Come on, all of you!" he shouted; "ef you have shot Bill Biddon, he can draw bead on you yit!"

In less time than it takes us to write it, his rifle was reloaded, but before he could fire, his enemies were invisible. Reduced to three, and convinced that capture was impossible, they had withdrawn and given up the pursuit.

Away flew the trapper like a meteor bursting across the prairie. He knew that he was not followed, and it was not fear that led him on.

"I must cotch 'em!" he muttered, putting his horse to the top of his speed. "You must travel, hoss, ef it kills you."

Not a jot of the terrific rate at which he was going was abated. Mile after mile flew under his feet—his hair streamed in the night-wind—his face wore a strange, unnatural look. His lips were tightly compressed, and at intervals he muttered brokenly to himself, or shouted hoarsely to the horse.

Finally, the light of day appeared in the east. The trapper looked up.

"I must be purty near up to 'em. They can't have rode as fast as me."

The sides of his horse were steamy and frothy, his nostrils dilated, and he breathed short and quick. As the prairie was illumined by the sun's rays, Biddon looked carefully ahead.

"They ought to be in sight; I've rode a long ways. B'ars and beavers! yender they ar'!"

On a distant swell of the prairie he saw his two friends. He swung his hat over his head and shouted. In a moment a faint halloo was returned. He was seen, and they were waiting for him.

Onward thundered the trapper, as if riding for life. A half-hour, and his panting horse was beside Nat's.

"Yer safe," he remarked, with a deep sigh. "I

dropped another, and they give up the chase. You can take yer time now; none of 'em will foller you more."

"But, Biddon, why have you ridden so fast? Your horse seems jaded to death. The Oregon trail is but a few miles away, and you needn't have hurried. We were waiting for you. What makes you look so strange? You are deadly pale. I see blood on your breast! My God! have you been shot?"

"Todd, Bill Biddon has got his last sickness at last!" replied the trapper, in a voice whose hollow depth was awful. "I wiped one of 'em out, and they blazed away with both thar shooters—one of the bullets *went clean through me!*"

Nat and Irene were horrified, and almost beside themselves.

"Is it a mortal wound? Can you not bear up till we find assistance? O, Biddon, you are not going to die now!"

"No—no—let me dress your wound," plead Irene, dismounting, and approaching him. The trapper motioned them back, and alighted himself.

"I've got to go under in less nor an hour," he said, in the same hollow tone, as Nat assisted him

to a seat. "I didn't want to do it alone, that's why I rode so hard to come up with you. Don't feel bad about it," added Biddon, languidly opening his eyes, as he heard the suppressed sobs of both his friends.

"Oh, Biddon! this is terrible. I'll never forgive myself for leaving you alone to carry on the battle," wailed Nat, kneeling beside him.

A shade of vexation crossed the trapper's face; his brows compressed slightly as he replied:

"It saved you and the gal, and let's hear no more of it. It won't do no good," he added, as he felt them examining his wound. "It's past doctorin'."

Irene had unslung the small canteen which he wore about the neck, and was bathing and dressing the wound to the best of her ability. A glance showed her and Nat that the man's words were true. A bullet had passed through his body in the neighborhood of the lungs, and life was fast ebbing out. His indomitable determination had sustained him up to this point. He knew no earthly power could ward off his dissolution, and his only wish was to die in the presence of the two whose lives

he had saved. Now that he had reached them, his will gave way, and he sunk with fearful rapidity. Nat and Irene saw that the most they could do was to soothe the dying man's moments, and no time was lost in lamentations. His hunting-shirt was opened, so as to allow the air to reach him, and the flow of blood partially stopped. His head was pillowed in the lap of Irene, who had removed his cap and brushed back the shaggy locks from his brow. In this position he lay, breathing heavily, and occasionally gasping, sometimes opening the eyes whose electric glitter was now deadened, and looking from Nat's face to that of Irene, where it seemed to love to linger. Once or twice it was noticed that his lips appeared to move, and it was with gratified astonishment that Nat heard the words of prayer passing his lips.

"Todd," at length he spoke, as if waking from a dream, "you and I've hunted together a long time, but we've got to part. I've 'spected this all through the winter, and am not sorry for myself. You've got the gal at last, and ar' fur enough to git her through to the States. Thar's a belt 'round my body, jist below the hurt. Will you take it off?"

Nat did as requested, and found he held in his hand a broad, thick, and exceedingly heavy belt.

"That's full of gold," he said, speaking at intervals. "I've been gatherin' it up for thirty year. Some of it came from the Hudson Bay Company, though it's little they give in that way besides trinkets. Thar's a good lot thar; take it, use it. It never can do me good, and I've no one else to give it to. Will you promise?"

Nat looked at Irene, and the two answered that they would. He then continued:

"Bury me in my clothes, my shooter, knives, and everything with me."

"Shall it be done here?" asked Nat.

"Yas; you'll have some trouble to dig the grave; but it needn't be deep, and a few stones rolled over it will keep the wolves and varmint away."

He ceased speaking for a while. During the disarrangement of his dress, Nat noticed a ribbon around his neck, concealed beneath his hunting-shirt. He examined it, not through any vulgar curiosity, and found it contained a small locket, in which was an exquisite painting of a young and beautiful girl. He was upon the point of asking the trapper's will respecting this, when the latter spoke.

"Thar's a pictur' you'll see 'round my neck—bury it with me. *She* was buried long years ago. It was *her* that made a trapper of Bill Biddon; but the story can't be told now. I meant to have told you, Todd, but the time has passed."

Another lapse of silence passed, during which the trapper's dissolution became more and more apparent. His face was of unearthly whiteness, and the film of death was already visible over his half-closed eyes. His lips continued moving, and after one or two attempts, he spoke aloud:

"Todd, you have talked to me 'bout what you called *religion,* and I remember how a mother used to pray fur me when I was young. Bill Biddon has led a quar life. He has taken many a scalp, and wiped out many a redskin, and whether that Being will take him after all this I can not tell. But I've thought about Him a good deal, and have tried to pray to Him fur a good while to come. Would you pray?"

Nat uttered a short, earnest prayer for the dying man, and he seemed much comforted.

"I feel better," he added, after he had finished. "I think, Todd, and Irene, I'll see you again, and Relmond, and the little angel of his wife.

Don't forget to tell them about old Bill Biddon, and——"

The trapper paused as a cloud swept over his features. His emotions were so singular that Nat, fearful the last moment had come, spoke:

"What is the matter, Biddon?"

"*The Injins ar' comin'!*" he replied, in his husky whisper.

"No—no, you are mistaken; none but your friends are around you," said Nat, fearing his mind was wandering. The trapper knit his brows, as if with pain, and added:

"No, I don't mean you. I know what I am about. *I hear the redskins,* I say. I hear the tramp of thar animals."

Nat, thinking perhaps there might be truth in what was said, sprung to his feet and swept the horizon. The view on the east was obstructed by a range of hills, but there were no signs of any human beings besides themselves. He repeated this to Biddon.

"*I hear the tramp of hosses!*" reiterated the latter. "It's hard to let my top-knot fall into thar hands after gettin' this far. Todd, will you do the last favor Bill Biddon will ever ask you?"

"Thar's a picture you'll see round my neck—bury it with me."

"Yes—yes—anything you wish."

"I would die hard, as I said, ef I thought they war to get my ha'r. Jist take my knife then, Todd, and lift it yerself, and the imps will be cheated, after all!"*

"O God! don't ask me that, Biddon," groaned Nat. "I'll fight over you as long as I can stand, but no power on earth could induce me to harm a hair of your head."

"I s'pose it isn't your edication, Todd; but I don't want my top-knot hang in an Injin's lodge. Can't you——"

"Surely, surely, Biddon, you're mistaken. There are no savages near us."

Irene touched Nat's arm and pointed toward the river-bottom. Some eight or ten horsemen had just emerged from below them and were approaching.

"They are not Indians—they are not Indians,

* This request of the dying trapper may seem incredible; but there are well-authenticated instances in the history of our frontier in which a ranger or scout has scalped his comrade, at the latter's prayer, to save the disgrace of his enemies' securing it. Their romantic fear, in this respect, seems equal to that of the Indian himself.

Biddon! They are friends — white people — whose horses you heard. They are here—cheer up!"

"I s'pose so; I know 'twas the tramp of animals I heard. Git up. Irene, pray fur me like an angel as you ar'."

Nat arose to catch the attention of the horsemen, while Irene complied with the holy request of the trapper. When our hero looked toward his companion again, he saw that Bill Biddon, the hunter and trapper, was dead!

The horsemen were a party of hunters, who had diverged from the Oregon trail to continue their operations in this direction. Two of them had been acquainted with the trapper several years before, and mourned his death with sincere sorrow. Several hours were spent in digging a grave, broad and deep, in which to place his body. Their knives were the only instruments employed, and when the body of Biddon was carefully lowered into the earth, it was high noon. He was buried in his

clothes, his faithful rifle beside him, and the locket, which contained the picture probably of some love that had exercised a potent influence over his life, still remained around his neck. The grave was wet by the tears of Nat and Irene, who mourned him as a rough but true-hearted and brave man whose loss could never be replaced. No slab or stone marks the lonely spot in the Far West, where all that is mortal remains of the trapper. It is on the bank of the Malheur River, a few miles west of the Oregon trail; but the feet of wild animals and the lapse of time have so obliterated all traces of it, that to-day even the eye of affection would fail to recognize it.

A few more words and the tale is finished. Nat and Irene accompanied the hunters down to Fort Boise, where they found another party upon the point of starting to California. As the present of Biddon furnished Todd with an ample supply of money, he concluded to take the steamer from San Francisco instead of risking another tedious and perilous journey across the plains. This course he followed out. In this city, he encountered the traveler with whom he had passed several days at Brown's Hole. It was he who had written the note

which occasioned so much wonderment. His information was derived from a hunter; and, believing it to be reliable, he withheld his name, fearing that Nat might suspect it to be only a piece of pleasantry, and he had quite a reputation for his jokes upon his companions.

The particulars of the homeward voyage need not be given. The storms and sunshine—the tempests and calms—the glorious moonlight nights and the delightful hours spent in communion with each other—the gradual growth of the tender passion—the all-important question and answer—the thousands of air-castles that arose in the enchanted future—all these, and many more, the reader can imagine.

Todd, when he arrived in New York, telegraphed to Relmond, who, accompanied by his wife, immediately visited him. For the first time since childhood, the long-lost, the long-separated sisters and orphans met. But time had only sanctified their love; and the friendship between Relmond and Todd remains uninterrupted to this day.

Nat, in the magnanimity of his heart, forgave his old flame Sarah Almina, now Mrs. Hankins, and she and her husband both helped to celebrate

the wedding. At the present writing, Nat resides in Maine, and is in a fair way to realize the wish expressed by him in the second paragraph of this tale.

THE END.

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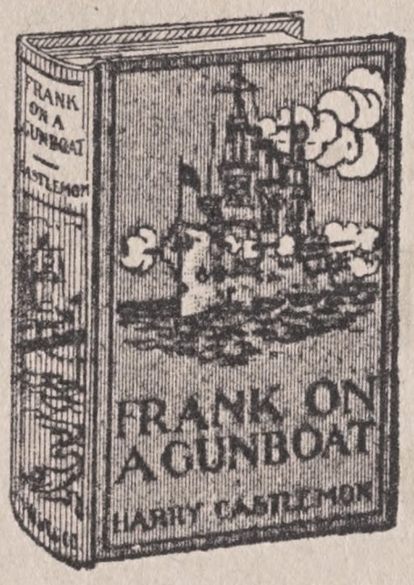

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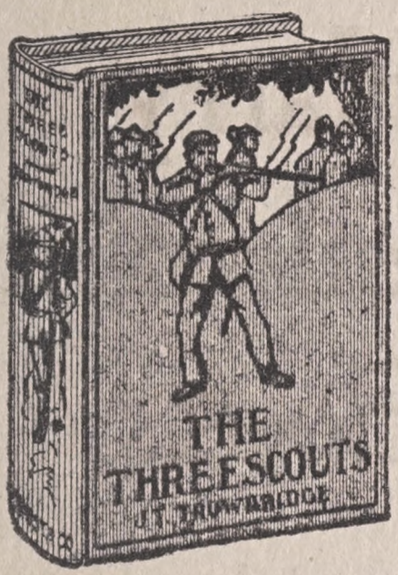

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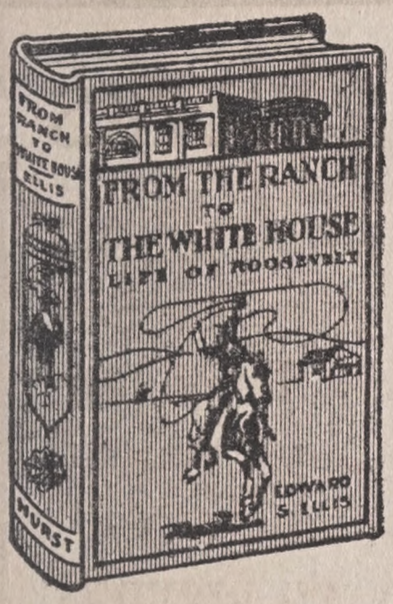

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